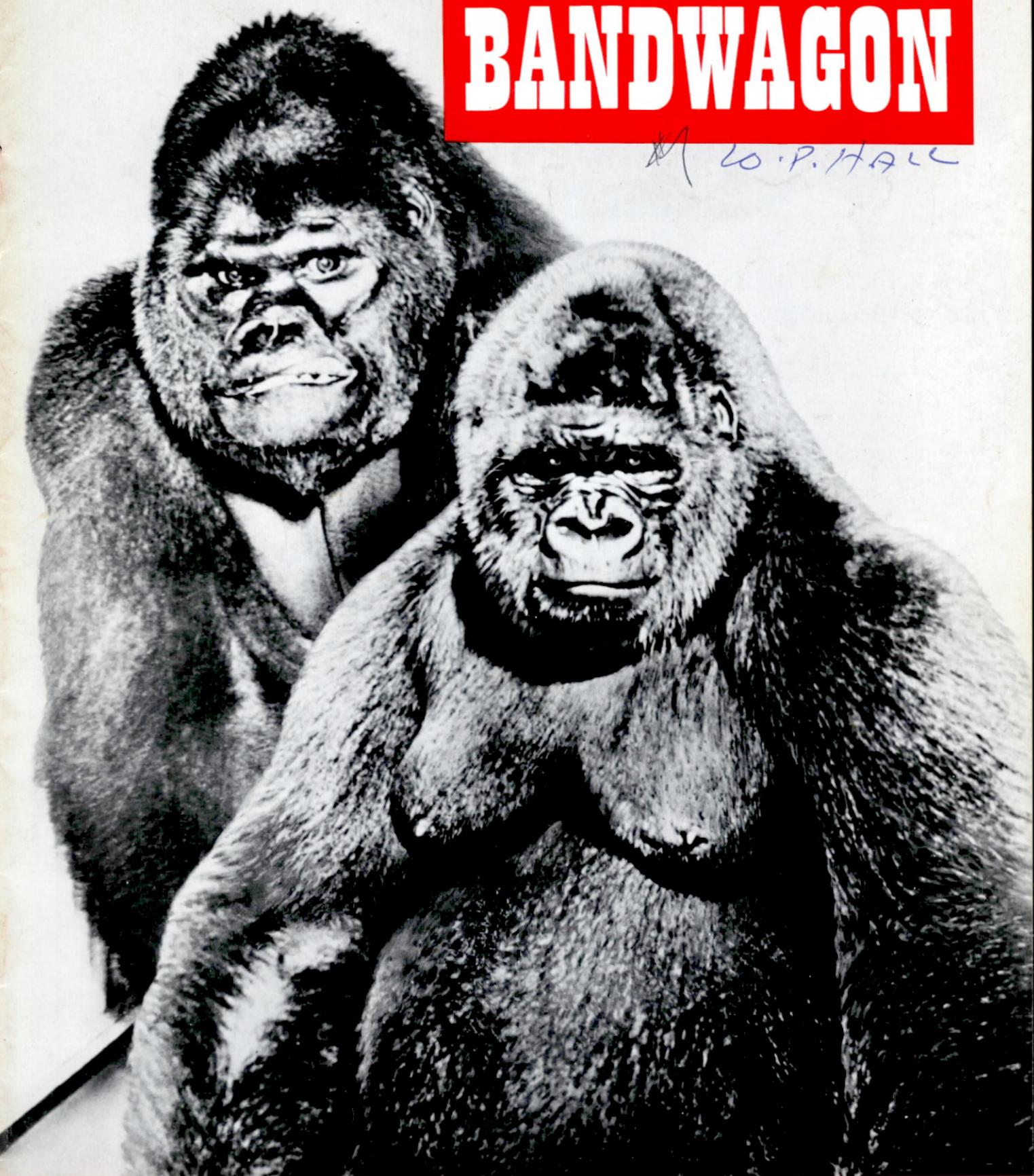


BIRNAM BROS

BANDWAGON

M. LO-P. HALL



MARCH-APRIL, 1974



**THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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THIS MONTH'S COVER

In 1938 John Ringling North brought Gargantua the Great to the American Circus scene. The gorilla was a sensation, as he toured the hippodrome track in his air conditioned cage during the performance of the 1938 season. Great interest continued when he was exhibited in the menagerie in 1939 and 1940.

If one gorilla caused that amount of publicity and interest, why not two? Gargantua was raised by Mrs. Gertrude Lintz. Another woman Mrs. E. Kenneth Hoyt raised a female baby gorilla from nine pounds to 430 pounds. She was named M'Toto, Swahili for youngster.

The female was purchased by Ringling-Barnum in February 1941. Another air conditioned cage was built and the two were advertised as Mr. and Mrs. Gargantua. In 1941 Gargantua weighed 525 pounds, was five feet six inches in height and had an arm stretch of 108 inches. His trainer was Richard Kroener. M'Toto weighed 430 pounds, was five feet two inches in height and had an arm stretch of 98 inches. Her trainer was Jose Tomas. The photo is from the Pfening Collection.

DUES NOTICES IN MAIL

Julian Jimenez, CHS Secretary-Treasurer, has mailed the 1974 dues and subscription notices.

It will be greatly appreciated if all payments can be made as soon as possible.

Any members or subscribers who have not forwarded payment of \$8 by June 1, 1974 will be removed from the Bandwagon mailing list.

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POSTAGE INCREASE

The increased mailing rates are not news to anyone, but they greatly affect the cost of postage for the Bandwagon.

It is vital that all readers advise the Editor of a change of address, IN ADVANCE. When the Bandwagon goes to your old address it is returned postage due to the Editor. It is not remailed to your new address, although the following issue will be sent to the new address. You may miss receiving an issue if you do not advise us of an address change in advance.

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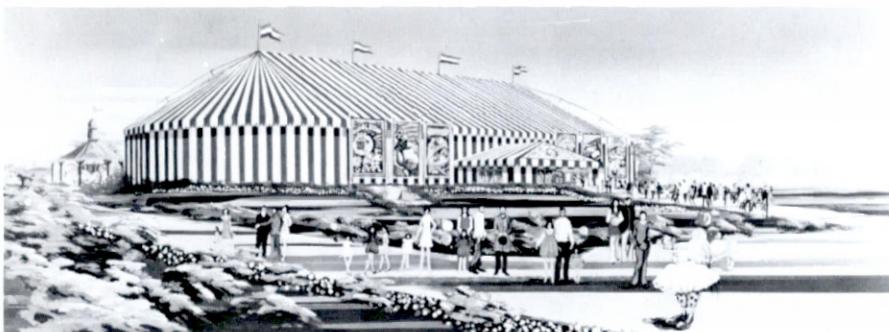
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Circus World Showcase Now Open in Florida

On February 20, 1974, the Circus World Showcase, of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus World, premiered in Barnum City, Florida, 30 miles southwest of Orlando.

Those on hand for the opening ranged from Harvey Cotton, Executive Assistant to Florida Governor Reubin Askew to Michu, the smallest man in the world. The 150 member Winter Haven and Haines City Florida High School Bands set the atmosphere with a repertoire of circus marches.

Lou Jacobs, perched atop Buckles Woodcock's elephant "Anna Mae," using enormous scissors snipped the three foot ribbon wrapped around the Showcase building. Several thousand balloons were released filling the sky to climax the ribbon-cutting's colorful ceremonies.

The guests then filed into Circus World Showcase past the hand painted giant circus mural, past the hall of circus lithographs and diorama into the Circus World Theatre.

Ringmaster Harold Ronk introduced the speakers before the presentation of the 18 minute Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus World Story. Accompanied by a huge three-dimensional electronic rendering, the narration with sounds and music serves as an introduction to the numerous components that will comprise Circus World.

The crowd then moved next door to the plush 600 seat James A. Bailey Theatre to see the IMAX film shown on the world's largest indoor motion picture screen, taller than a six story building.

Following the film the guests moved on to the cookhouse, and partook in such treats as Barnum Blueberry Muffins, Ringling Red Hots, Bailey Cinnamon Toast, Sunburst Artichokes, Center Pole Sandwiches and Pink Lemonade.

In the "backyard" a seventy year old giant Carrousel, awaited the crowd, as did a ponderous herd of elephants, both available for riding. Camel rides were also available to the backyard visitors. The Circus World giraffes were also on display here.

The Circus World Elephants under trainer William "Buckles" Woodcock performed throughout the day.

The Circus World Showcase itself is a

The Circus World Showcase covers 25,000 square feet and has two theatres each holding 600 people. The carrousel building is at the left of the main building.

gigantic four pole big top like structure, covering 25,000 square feet. It is bigger on the inside than the outside, due to size of the theatres that go far below ground level.

A colorful and artistic circus ticket wagon at the main entrance serves as an introduction as one enters the Showcase building itself.

But all of this is just the beginning folks, in a few years the complete park will be built with its P. T. Barnum Museum, Clown College, Training Arenas and Circus History Museum, and many other features.

RARE COLLECTOR ITEMS !!!

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NOTES TOWARD A HISTORY OF JUGGLING

By Marcello Truzzi
with Massimiliano Truzzi

Although numerous works exist outlining the basic techniques of juggling, how-to books, there has been a remarkable paucity of information available about its history. Similar problems exist with most of the great folk arts of the circus. Though there is much information available through interviews with still active performers, such occupational history continues to be neglected. What follows is a brief attempt at such cultural salvage, in part with the hope of encouraging others to collect similar facts about other circus arts.

JUGGLING AND ANCIENT HISTORY

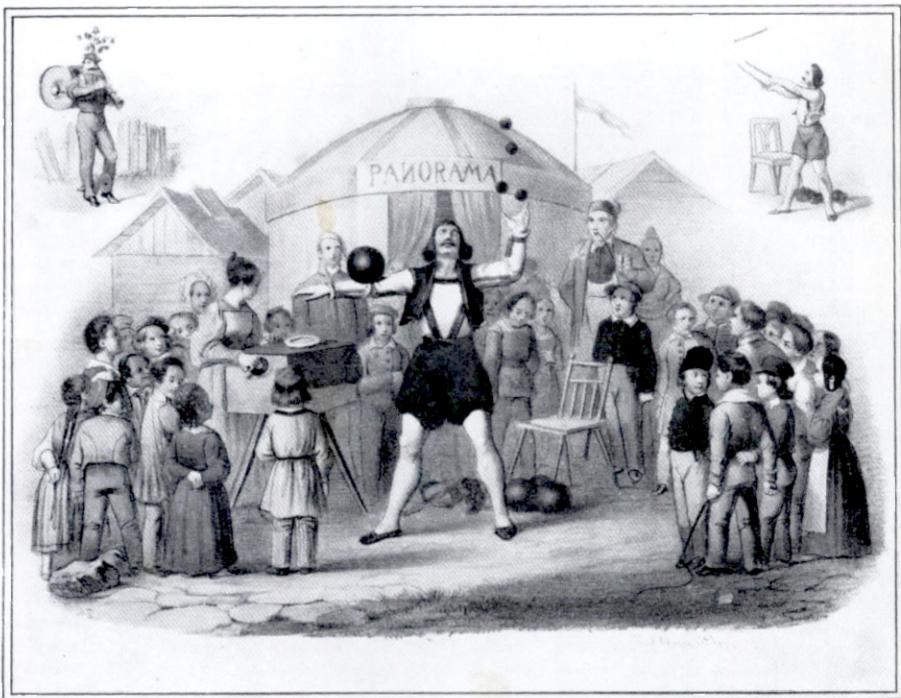
The history of juggling is a long and fascinating one. The art has been with man in some form as long as civilization. There is evidence of jugglers during the great Egyptian civilization where it was imported from India. Juggling has been an institution for many centuries with Japan, China, South East Asia, Iran and Tibet. Even the Aztecs and other native Americans had jugglers. Jugglers in these early cultures were often prominent in the religious and mythological rituals. It is probably here that juggling had its origin along with other forms of dexterity, for some forms of juggling are found even today in primitive tribes, practiced by their shamans.

Juggling was a favorite with the Greeks and later with the Romans. In ancient Rome various names were given what we today call jugglers, e.g., *ventilatores* (knife-throwers) and *pilarii* (ball players).

In its early forms juggling was usually combined with other forms of entertainment such as slight-of-hand and acrobatics. Juggling is a specialized form of entertainment which is quite recent. The *joculatores* were the mimes of the Middle Ages. The French use of the word *jongleurs* (an erroneous form of *jougeleur*) included the singers known as *trouveres*, and the humbler English minstrels of the same type gradually passed into the strolling jugglers from whose exhibitions the term came to cover loosely the acrobatic, pantomimic, and slight-of-hand performances.

There is very little known about these early jugglers, since most of them were vagabonds, and in their gypsy-like travels they were known to the community only through their display of skills in the city streets through which they wandered. Slowly, the art developed until finally it loosened itself from the *legerdemain* which usually accompanied it. (*Legerdemain* differs from juggling in that the juggler openly exhibits his skill, making no attempt to camouflage his dexterity of hand, while the slight-of-hand performer frequently masks his dexterity in order to produce astounding results).

Despite our lack of real knowledge about individual performers or their exact ac-



This German print shows a vagabond juggler around the 17th Century. Deutsche Circus-Zeitung 1957, Pfening Collection.

complishments, many stories and legends surrounding or including these wayfarers developed. A good example of such a popular story was that of "Le Jongleur de Notre Dame," originally a medieval miracle play which went through many versions including one by Anatole France which was later presented as an opera by Massenet in 1902.

MODERN JUGGLING

Juggling per se did not develop into the specialized art that we now witness until the advent of certain Asiatics into Europe. The earliest record of a juggler in the modern sense appears to be a Chinese, Lau Laura, who was at Drury Lane in 1832.

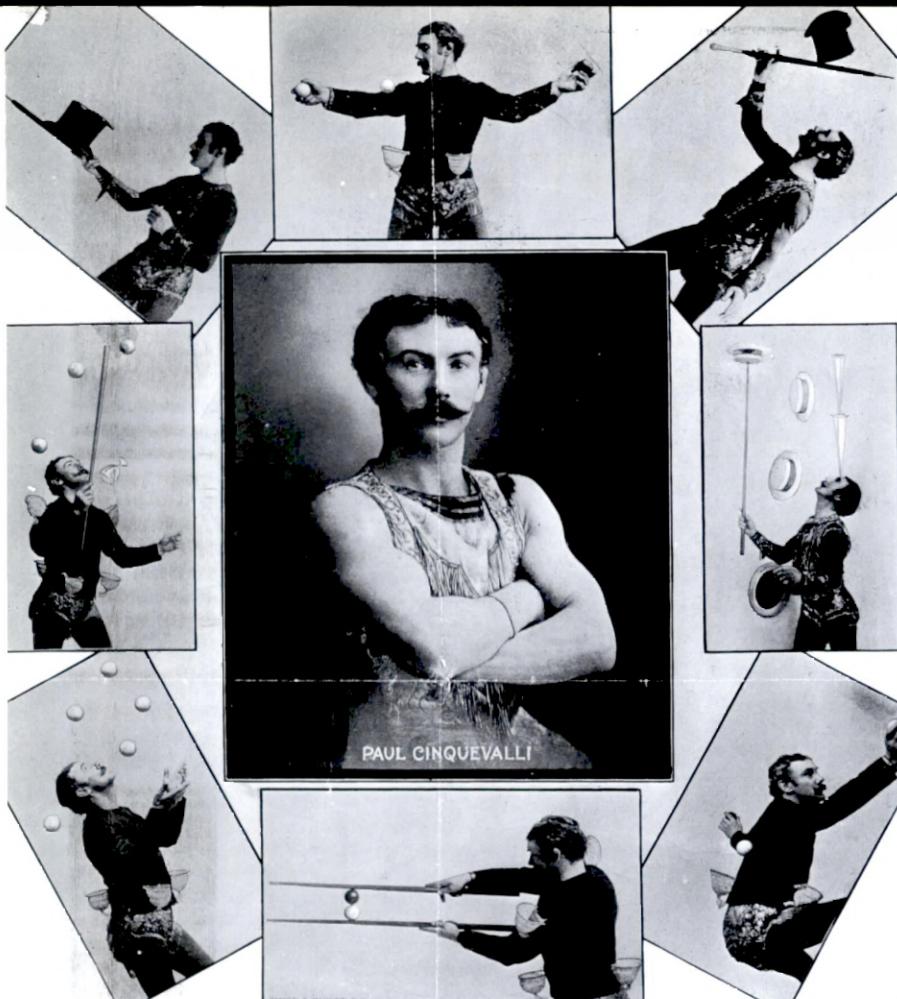
In its early development juggling followed certain formal patterns. First there were the *kraft-jugglers* or *jongleurs de force*. These were jugglers who specialized in the manipulation of heavy objects and weights. They would work with such objects as cannon-balls. A good example of such a juggler was Severus Scheffer who was descended from a family of street jugglers. He copied the Danish juggler Holtum, and preceded another great "weight juggler," Paul Conches (also a German) who appeared dressed as a Hussar. Another great *kraft-juggler* was Paul Spadoni, also a German. Most of the great *kraft-jugglers* were German, but it was apparently the vogue to take Italian names. Spadoni came into the ring dressed as a Roman on a chariot. He then dismissed the horses and proceeded to balance the chariot

on his head. One of his typical tricks was done with a small spring-board. He would drop a cannon-ball on the board which would send another into the air, and he would catch the ball in flight upon the back of his neck. Spadoni, born in 1870, copied

Felix Adanos, perhaps the greatest salon juggler of today, appeared with Ringling-Barnum Circus in 1955. He is resident of Vienna, Austria. Photo from Mr. Adanos.



ADANOS



Scheffer who was well known around 1900. Contemporary with Scheffer were Paul Cinquevalli and Kara. Weight juggling is almost obsolete today.

The second popular form of juggling was "salon juggling" by the juggler *mondain*. The German juggler Kara (who often claimed to be American) has often been called the first salon juggler, but he is preceded by Aqoust, a typical juggler of 1860-86 who staged his act in a restaurant setting. The salon juggler was one who usually worked in formal dress and jugged such objects as his cane, gloves, top hat or derby, and articles to be found in the drawing room such as flower bouquets, billiard balls, and cues. Kara seems to have been the greatest of the salon jugglers. Kara was taught by Pospischil, the manager of a trapeze duo, who in turn was taught by Scheffer. Juggling has seemingly always been an oral tradition, taught by one practitioner to another. Another great salon juggler was Salerno (also German). He was a particularly great inventor of new juggling tricks and apparatus. Although he used some artificial effects employing "gimmicks," he was nevertheless a very excellent artist. Possibly the greatest modern salon juggler is the German artist, Adan os.

Although we are, in this discussion, classifying jugglers into specialized categories, most jugglers still combined into their acts many of these forms. A good example of this more eclectic type of juggling was Paul Cinquevalli (another German, born in Posen, whose real name was Lehmann-

Paul Cinquevalli, appeared in the United States just prior to the turn of the century. He was featured in this spread of photos appearing in The New York Clipper around 1895. Pfening Collection.

Braun) who achieved great fame in England at the turn of the century. He entered dressed in a leotard and tights and performed many balancing feats and some weight juggling.

A third specialization was that of the Equestrian Juggler, that is, the performer who would juggle while standing upon the back of a moving horse. Probably the greatest of these was Briatori. He was the first (and possibly the last) to juggle seven balls while standing on a moving horse! Another great Equestrian Juggler, Nicolai Nikitin (the son of the famous Russian circus owner), was a particularly great showman and was also a very fine salon juggler when he exercised his skill on the ground. Another great Equestrian Juggler was Enrico Truzzi, the father of Massimiliano Truzzi, the greatest juggler in the generation following Enrico Rastelli's death.

A fourth form of juggling is that of the Antipodist. An antipodist is one who juggles objects with his feet. Generally, jugglers think of antipodism as a separate form of juggling. Although it can be very well done and can be very difficult, it is relatively limited in its possibilities and generally consists of balancing and/or spinning of objects upon the feet while lying upon the back. This form of juggling is most often com-

bined with other forms of dexterity. Quite often it is found in combination with acrobatics, the one performer "juggling" the other with his feet while the latter performs somersaults, etc. This form of antipodism is not usually considered a form of juggling, and its practitioners are known as icarians. Although there have been many Oriental antipodists, the greatest icarians seem to have been Europeans, especially Germans and Hungarians.

The fifth and final classification of these early jugglers is that of the Group Jugglers. This consists of more than one person juggling the same objects back and forth. A fine example of this category was the well known French family, the Perezoffs, which at one time consisted of eleven persons. Another very fine group juggling act was the Amoros family, a German troupe, one of whose members was the first recorded person to ever juggle nine balls in the air at one time. There have been many group juggling acts in the past, but they are slowly becoming extinct. It is today more financially practical for acts to be small, and this applies not only to juggling acts; jugglers today usually work as singles or sometimes as duos. There are some group jugglers, but their caliber is not comparable to those of the past. Some of the great group juggling acts were the Mangadors, the Arizonas, the Aicardis, and the D'Angolys (who, by the way, are related to the Briatori family).

The early 1900's brought the end of these specialized schools of juggling. Although there still exist persons doing many of the tricks which were performed, the classifications no longer exist in a pure state. The Weight Jugglers are no longer seen, and the Equestrian Juggler seems also to have dis-

Massimiliano Truzzi came to the United States to appear with the Ringling-Barnum Circus in 1940. Pfening Collection.





James Evans, a foot juggler, appeared in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s. As shown here he used a "trinka" stand to support himself while on his back. Foot juggling had been practiced by Oriental performers using the "trinka" prior to the development of the risley act around 1814, which used the same type stand for juggling people. Pfenning Collection.

Oriental jugglers who so greatly influenced the art is much more clouded in obscurity. Although we today think of the Oriental jugglers primarily in terms of the much over-done and over-emphasized plate spinning, many of them were expert in other forms. Since they were members of a strange minority group and "outsiders" to the average European, their sometimes magnificent feats were underestimated. Somehow the viewers seemed to impute these visitors from the East with a natural talent for such difficult techniques. Because of this, the individual names of some of these performers just were not noted, and their feats were not fully described. Nevertheless, we can not fail to note the important influence which they have had upon this ancient art. It is significant that Lau Laura was the first recorded performer who specialized in juggling to be found in Europe. It should be noted also, however, that Oriental juggling followed a somewhat different pattern than that which we have discussed. It consisted primarily of balancing feats. One particularly amazing trick which was quite common was the rolling on the body, in all sorts of ways, of a large trident. This trick, as was common with most Oriental juggling, was usually coupled with amazing contortions and acrobatic skills. Another common feat was the manipulation and dexterous handling of large balls of twine or yarn. This was the basis for the fantastic use of rubber ball manipulation by the greatest juggler the world has ever known — Enrico Rastelli.

One thing more must be mentioned: the Oriental jugglers. There is, very unfortunately, very little record of even these early European jugglers, and the fate of the early



Ufnehmen: Wintergarten, Berlin

ENRICO RASTELLI

Once in every art's history, there emerges a figure whose talents and motivations are so unique that he will achieve heights in his profession which will never be surpassed and which still shine forth to dazzle any future aspirants. Such a person was Enrico Rastelli — undoubtedly the greatest juggler the world has yet produced. The feats of this fantastic performer are circus legend, and they seem even more phenomenal to those who understand their technical difficulty.

Enrico Rastelli was born into a circus family. His father was Alberto Rastelli, a juggler himself but primarily a circus aerialist or "flyer." Enrico was born in Siberia in 1896 when his family was touring Russia. Although he might have spent some of his early years in Italy (details are unavailable), the greater portion of his youth was

The Aicardis were one of the great group juggling acts of modern times. They appeared in the United States in 1939. Pfenning Collection.

spent in Russia; and it was in Russia that he acquired his skill and his first great reputation.

His father wished for him to become an aerialist, and he did work in his father and mother's aerial act, but at a very early age juggling captured his being. To Rastelli, juggling was not a task to be laboriously performed; it was his first love. He literally practiced night and day throughout his short life. It was not uncommon for him to practice twelve hours a day, and he seldom practiced less than six. He would often converse with performers and even conduct his business affairs while practicing. He truly loved his art, and this love was clearly reflected in his miraculous feats. At one point in Germany, his act, which was a solo performance always, was so filled with variety that it lasted a full forty minutes!



Rastelli shown here balancing a group of soccer balls, was also a master of the juggling of a variety of objects at once. Author's Collection.

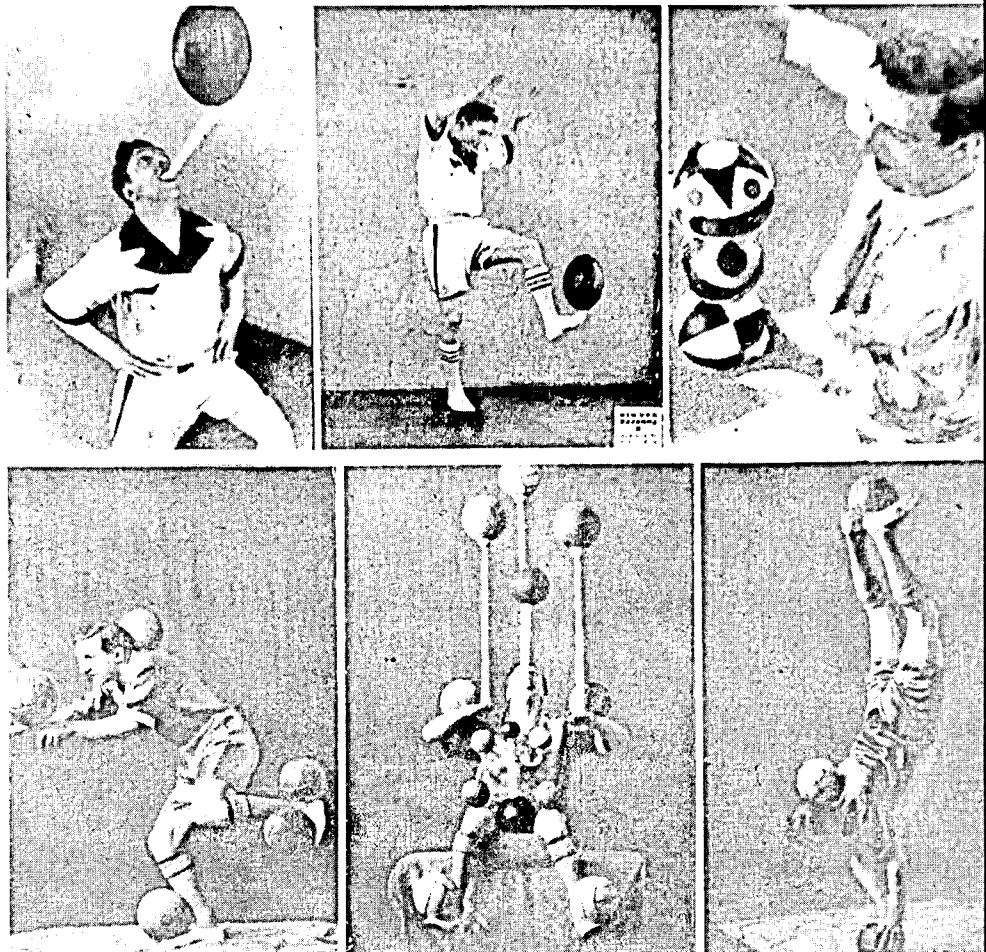
Rastelli's contributions to juggling were many, but the most important was his introduction of the manipulation of a large (six to twelve inches in diameter), air-filled rubber ball. At an early age, Rastelli saw the Japanese juggler Takashima, who used a cotton ball which he manipulated with a stick in his mouth. Rastelli saw the potentialities for exercising juggling skill with this and, by using a child's rubber ball instead of the cotton one, turned such manipulation into an unparalleled work of art. His feats were unbelievable in their exacting coordination as he threw and caught the ball with all parts of his body. It was Rastelli, too, who began the now commonly seen practice of throwing the ball into the audience, having them throw it back, and catching it on a stick held in his mouth. Rastelli was the father of what is usually called Ball Juggling — the physical manipulation in various ways of inflated rubber balls. Ball Juggling includes such dexterous feats as spinning the ball on the fingers, bouncing the ball continuously on the head, and generally throwing and catching the ball with various parts of the body. The degree of control which Rastelli exhibited has never been entirely equalled. His manipulations

even included the use of the oblong rugby football, a task still unmatched. In his last years Rastelli introduced the manipulation of the soccer ball into his act, and his extraordinary skill dazzled professional soccer players and fans alike. He could carry on a lengthy conversation while constantly and alternately, smoothly bouncing two balls on his forehead!

In addition to his mastery of Ball Juggling, Rastelli also was the master of what we shall term "pure" or Straight Juggling. Straight Juggling consists of the ability to throw up a number of objects into the air and alternately catch them. This is the form which one usually associates with juggling. In our later discussion of the technical aspects of juggling, the reader will see that there are various "systems" of juggling which are quite independent from one another. The most common such technique or system for juggling is called "cascading" and this system is used only to juggle an odd number of objects. For some quite inexplicable reason, Rastelli never cascade jugged to any degree. Thus, he would juggle eight objects or six objects but not seven. It was possible that he *could* juggle seven objects, but he never did so in his act.

Rastelli limited himself to juggling three types of objects: small rubber balls, sticks, and plates. Rastelli was the complete master of juggling eight balls. This is a phenomenal feat which is generally not appreciated by a non-professional viewer. The general public is full of misconceptions about juggling having seen circus posters showing drawings of performers manipulating a vast multitude of objects. When one considers that juggling eight balls means that seven balls must be separately hurled into the air with such speed and precision that the eighth ball can be hurled into the air smoothly before the first ball can be caught, one recognizes the great skill required. And throwing eight balls into the air and just catching them is difficult enough, but continuously keeping up such an orbiting rotation is infinitely more arduous. Rastelli did, in fact, throw up and catch ten balls, but he did this for only one rotation. Apparently he only seriously concerned himself with attempting ten balls when he heard that a member of the Amoros family had set a record juggling nine balls. Since Rastelli did not like to cascade juggle, he did not bother with nine balls and directly attempted ten. However, it must be noted that it was not just the quantity of objects which made Rastelli's juggling phenomenal; it was the facile and flawless manner in which he accomplished his astounding feats.

Rastelli never jugged the commonly seen Indian clubs which one sees jugglers using today; he jugged wooden sticks. Unlike a club, which is wider at one end, a stick is narrow and evenly balanced, although the stick does have one end (usually white) which is designed as its handle. Sticks and clubs are the most difficult objects to juggle, for they must be given a specific number of turns in order that they might be properly



This group of photos show Rastelli demonstrating a number of the feats that brought him fame. The photos originally appeared in a 1932 issue of Rivista de Bergamo, an Italian magazine. Pfening Collection.

caught on their handles. Rastelli jugged eight sticks, and he was the complete master of six sticks. Rastelli's juggling of six sticks has never been equalled. Not only did he juggle them at a fantastically quick pace, but he did so at a low height where others have not been able to juggle four. He jugged five sticks and one ball together — a most difficult feat due to the differences in weight and throwing technique. He also jugged six torches, and the things that he could do with three torches have never been equalled. His physical stamina was amazing in itself. He would juggle three torches passing them alternately under each leg while goose-stepping completely around a large stage three times!

Rastelli's juggling of plates was equally astounding. The nature of plate juggling, that is, their curious shape, makes it exceedingly difficult to initially throw up more than three from each hand. However, Rastelli overcame this difficulty by constructing an apparatus attached to his legs which could loosely hold two plates. He would then juggle six plates into the air, thereupon grabbing the additional two

plates from his legs, and thus he got the full eight plates into a continuous orbit. And he would do this while simultaneously balancing a tall object upon his forehead! This feat has never been duplicated. He also was the first, and one of the very few jugglers, to juggle six plates while simultaneously bouncing a small rubber ball continuously upon his forehead.

Rastelli was not only a rare artist, but also an intelligent and fine human being. He had the reputation of remarkably grand person and friend, and it was said that he had no enemies — a rare thing in such a competitive profession as show business. For example, when Rastelli fled Russia in 1919 due to the revolution there, he came to Italy virtually unknown. He initially went to work with the Circus Gatti and was an overnight sensation. But despite many great offers to appear in bigger and more spectacular shows, he remained with Gatti for a few years out of friendly loyalty. Finally he did leave Gatti, and in 1923 he visited the United States where he performed at the Hippodrome in New York. He returned to Europe and in Bergamo, Italy, in 1931, he cut his mouth very slightly with the mouthpiece that he used in his act. This cut became infected and he died. He was only thirty-five years old and in his prime. The world will never see his equal.
(© Copyright 1974 by Marcello Truzzi)

BOSTON.

SATURDAY EVENING, SEPT. 4, 1819.

A SHORT HISTORY OF THREE EQUESTRIAN ACTS

By Stuart Thayer

This paper was first presented at the 1973 Circus Historical Society Convention in Baraboo, Wisconsin.

From its beginnings the circus performance was based on the performing horse, ridden and not, and until quite recently the rider was the ultimate circus athlete. He was the initial attraction, as proved by Philip Astley, the English cavalryman, and continued as the most advertised and highest paid ring performer. Indeed, the rider had no peer in the hearts and minds of both the entrepreneur and the audience until the flying trapeze performer replaced him in the late nineteenth century.

We must realize what excitement the rider created. His audience knew horses, owned them, rode them, yet they would pay money to see a man ride them in the way the circus equestrian did. John Bill Ricketts' ability to dance a hornpipe on the back of a moving horse astounded the public. By the same token one would guess that a man sitting in a chair atop a speeding automobile would startle us as he went by today. Rural audiences were sometimes convinced that circus riders used magic to stay on their horses. It was not unknown to attempt to have them arrested as witches and conjurors. George Stone relates such an event in his memoirs.¹

Whether it was because of this constant popularity or, more likely, the desire not to change routines which were so well received year after year, equestrian acts have undergone very little change in the one hundred and eighty years they have been presented in America. Most of the acts seen in the early nineteenth century were still seen in the tented circuses in the 1930's. The only exceptions to this are what we might term ethnic riding, including wild west, cossack and those drills descended from the *Spanische Reitschule* in Vienna.

Three of the early acts were performed in the first American circus, that of John Bill Ricketts, in the period 1793 to 1800. Two of them are still with us, though in altered form, and the third, more a pantomime than a circus routine as we think of such today, was eliminated by the change in the arena and the necessity of presenting many short acts.

The first of these Ricketts called the Egyptian Pyramid act. It initially involved three riders, one of whom stood on the thighs of the other two, thus forming a pyramid. A better description might be mounted pyramid act. We have seen this done as recently as the 1950's by some of the large, family riding acts such as the

Loyal-Repensky troupe and the Christianis. More cumbersome than dangerous, especially as the number of horses was increased, this turn had to be done slowly just to avoid congestion in the ring.

The first American performance was by Ricketts' company in Boston in 1795. Two men, each on a horse, supported a third who stood on their shoulders.² A variation was a three high column, the low man straddling two horses. In 1796 in Philadelphia they presented five men (more probably three men and two boys) on three horses. This was done by Thomas Franklin and Francis Ricketts supporting John Bill Ricketts who held aloft, presumably one on each thigh, Master Hutchins and Master Long. Apprentices were always the top men in these acts, yet we have found no record of any of them being injured.

It must be remembered that none of these turns were done on bareback horses. The animals were saddled, though not with road saddles. In 1798 Philip Lailson's troupe advertised an Egyptian Pyramid act in Charleston which we assume was near to what Ricketts was offering.³ Again in Charleston, this time in 1802, Langley and Company presented the routine.⁴ We see such acts in 1810 and 1813 by Pepin and Breschard, the latter year featuring nine people on three horses. In 1819 Pepin called this the Roman pyramids and later the Venetian pyramids.

It is easy to advance the calendar, though not the art, from those days. The act eventually involved bareback horses, but the size of the ring and the number of people is nearly the same. By 1830 the ringmaster had become a component in all riding acts, which relieved the riders from having to maintain their balance as well as control the animals. Also, by the late nineteenth century clowning was introduced into such turns allowing the large family troupes to be almost a show in themselves.

We previously referred to an act that was more a pantomime than a circus turn as we think of them today. This was the famous and long lasting presentation called "Billy Buttons, or The Tailor Riding to Brentford." It might still be with us if pantomime was popular, if people were familiar with the nuances of attempting to ride a horse

John Bill Ricketts introduced the Egyptian Pyramid act. This newspaper ad was published on September 4, 1819, advertising the circus at the Boston Washington Gardens. It lists "The first time of the GRAND PYRAMIDS of VENICE, by eleven persons on THREE HORSES." Original newspaper ad from Pfening Collection.

CIRCUS,

WASHINGTON GARDENS.

Last week but one previous to the Benefits.

Monday evening, Sept. 6th,

The Evening's Entertainment to commence with a GRAND MILITARY ENTRY

*By eight Equestrians, elegantly mounted.
To conclude by a Minuet and Contre Dance by
Messrs. Pepin and Campbell.*

Master THOMAS will on one horse perform many surprising Feats of Horsemanship, and conclude by leaping over two Ribbons his Horse in full speed.

Great Vaulting,

By Mr. Garcia, who will vault over his Horse right and left, at the same time he is leaping over boards, shewing every means of mounting and dismounting without the aid of stirrups—he will also pick up two handkerchiefs from the ground placed in different parts of the Ring and conclude with the great feat of the ESCARPADE.

The first time of the GRAND PYRAMIDS of VENICE, by Eleven persons on THREE HORSES.

MASTER McCARN,

*The Wonderful Prodigy, will, on one Horse, perform many Elegant and Surprising Feats for
■ Youth only ten years of age, and conclude his performance Riding on his Head, his Horse in full Speed.*

Miss Wealand, on one Horse, will perform many graceful feats and attitudes, and conclude with the *BROAD SWORD EXERCISE*.

Slack Rope, by Mr. Mayhier.

*Metamorphose of the Sack,
By Mr. Bogardes, to conclude with the Fricasee Dance.*

The wonderful Spanish horse ROMEO, Will after leaping over Bars, of a prodigious height, leap over one horse, and carry Master McCarn as his rider.

Mr. Bogardes will after several steps and attitudes leap over Garters, Boards of lights, and conclude by leaping thro' TWO Hogsheads.

STILL VAULTING,

By the whole troop of Voltigueres.
MR. CAMPBELL :: CLOWN.

*The whole to conclude with a Grand Display of FIRE WORKS.
By Mr. Dusolla.*

Owing to the short stay of the Company, there will be a Performance every evening during the week, Saturday and Sunday excepted.

Doors to be opened at half-past six—Performance to commence at half-past 7 o'clock.

Box One Dollar—Pit Fifty Cents.—Tickets to be had at the Office from 10 until the performance commences.

that did not want to be ridden and if a circus act were allowed to run as long as the Buttons act did.

Billy Buttons first saw the light of day in London at Astley's Amphitheatre on May 7, 1771.⁵ The first American presentation predates the American circus itself, occurring on May 28, 1773 in New York and being done by the itinerant rider Jacob Bates.⁶

The act usually involved two men and a horse. One performer played Billy Buttons, a tailor with no knowledge of riding, the other played a hostler, or later, the postmaster. To use a modern theatrical term this hostler was generally a straight man to Buttons' concerned outcries, but sometimes was a sort of rube-philosopher. The horse was highly trained, which was a great part of the appeal of the act.

Buttons entered in haste, having to keep an appointment for a fitting at some country estate. The hostler would lead out the horse and Buttons would attempt to mount. The horse would resist in various ways and would eventually return to his stable, sometimes by jumping through the window, ending the piece.

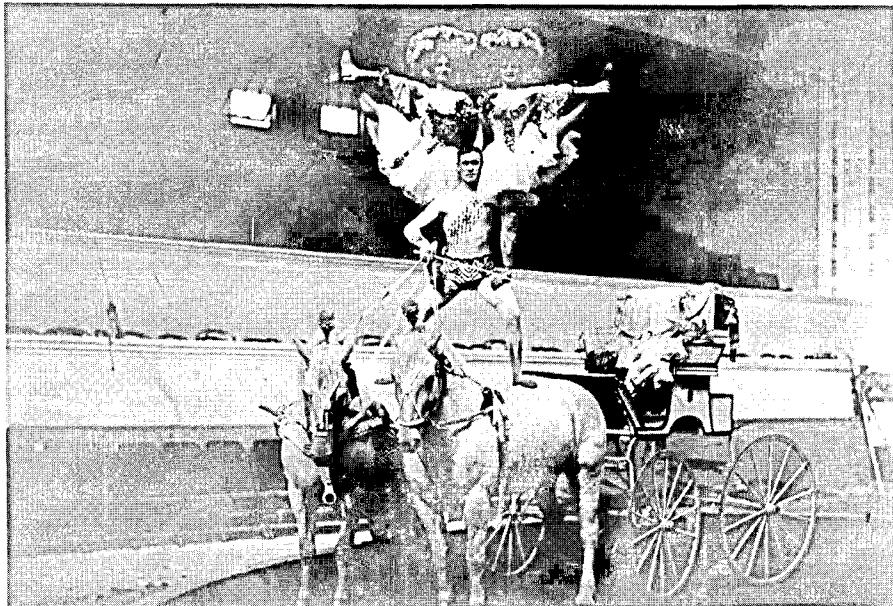
The contretemps between man and beast made for the comedy; later, when speaking was allowed, the hostler's replies to Buttons' anguished questions added to this. The horse would sit, lie down, buck, even chase Buttons about the ring or stage in its efforts to avoid being ridden. Some were trained to lie down, pinning Buttons underneath. Sometimes Buttons would mount to find himself facing the horse's rear, sometimes the horse would be trained to flick its tail so that Buttons' hat was knocked off. There were many variations in the fifty years that the act was presented.

As mentioned above, it was Ricketts' circus that first presented Buttons in a full program. This was done at least by January 9, 1796, possibly earlier. Having been exposed to the turn in England it follows that his troupe was familiar with it. He had a horse named *Silver Heels* that was trained for the act.

Variations appeared as early as 1797 when Francis Ricketts, operating a sub-troupe of his brother's company, called the act "Johnny Gilpin's Ride to Brentford". The title in this case referred to Cowper's poem of 1782 which relates the wild ride of another incompetent horseman. In 1798 Philip Lailson offered "The Apprentice No Horseman" in which three horses were offered to the tailor and from which he could not make a choice. Such a three-horse act was also presented by Pepin and Barnet in Louisville in 1823.⁷

The common title came to be, "The Hunted Tailor", but why this should be we do not know. Except for Buttons being chased around the ring we see no hunted aspect in the turn.

By 1824 the clown had been introduced in addition to Buttons and we suspect this was to bolster the vocal aspect of the performance; in other words to put new life into what was by then a well-known act. Also, the clown may have replaced the



This reverse version of the pyramid was performed by the Duttons on the Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows in the early 1900s. Pfening Collection.

hostler who then became the postmaster, a more solemn character it would appear, thus giving the clown two people for foils. The clown was first introduced in Albany on J. W. Bancker's program.⁸

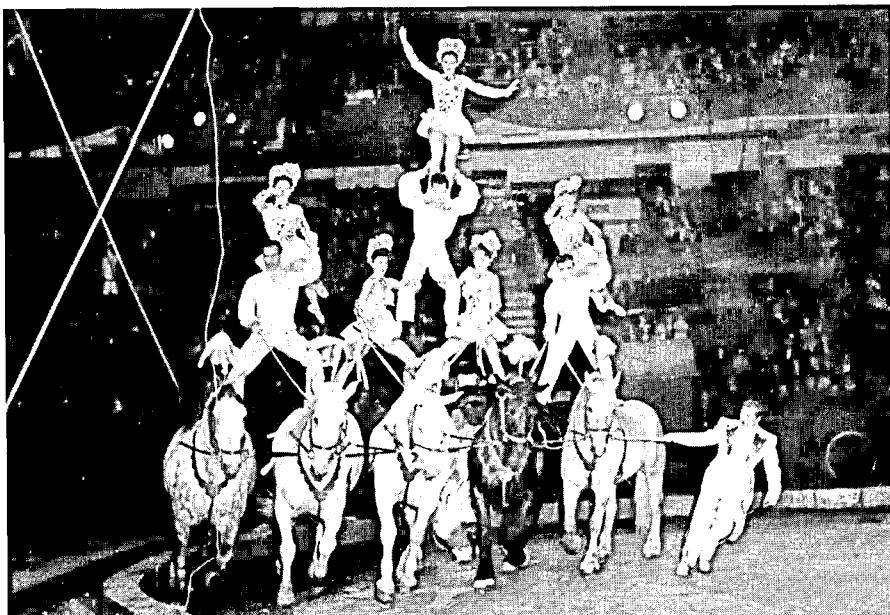
Other variations, and possibly the definitive ones, were Fogg and Stickney's lilliputian "Hunted Tailor" featuring apprentices riding on ponies and the 1829 in-

A more modern interpretation of the pyramid riding act is demonstrated by the Loyal Repensky Riding Troupe on the Ringling-Barnum Circus during the 1944 season. Pfening Collection.

roduction of a Mrs. Buttons, played by a male actor, on William Blanchard's show. By the late 1840's Billy Buttons was in decline and only the smaller shows presented it thereafter. We have found no references to it after 1850.

The final one of the three acts under discussion is the one known today as the "Pete Jenkins Act." It is the one turn of these that has seen the most change, yet the one most often still performed. This may be important; the fact that the act that changed is the one that lasted longest. As with the others its American career derives from Ricketts who first called it a "Metamorphosis".

In New York in 1793 Ricketts introduced a piece in which he stood on his moving horse and drew a sack up around himself until it covered all but his head. He then





COMIC BARE BACK ACT.

Here comes an odd creature upon a swift horse,
To judge from the clothes it's a woman of course.
With a man on her shoulders, you'd think she'd
fall down,

But as she comes nearer, you see its the Clown!
Who throws off the bonnet and dress in a trice,
And grins with delight at his funny device:
While the other one laughs at his antics with glee,
And walks down a plank, on a keg, as you see.

A variation of the Pete Jenkins, flying wardrobe act, is pictured in his illustration from an 1883 children's circus book. Pfenning Collection.

slowly lowered the sack and revealed that he had changed costume. He went through this again, revealing a third costume. There is no evidence to indicate that he ever attempted more than two changes. It must have been a well-received number as Ricketts did it often during his seven years in this country.

Later performers who copied him were Mr. Stewart of Stewart and Company in 1809, John Rogers with Price and Simpson in 1825 and Brock and Elder on two horses with Crane and Eldred in 1834.

The first variation was introduced by Victor Pepin during the initial season of the firm of Pepin and Breschard in Boston in 1807. He titled the act "The Fisherwoman" and he appeared dressed as an enormous woman standing on the back of a horse. As the animal circled the ring Pepin began to disrobe, peeling off a number of successive costumes. Cayetano Mariotini did the same act on the same show in 1810, ending up dressed as a cavalier.

In 1812 Francoise Seigne, again of Pepin's troupe, did the act as a Fisher man. In this same year we find Cayetano performing it in Charleston and calling it "The Canadian Peasant".⁹ All of them involved several changes of costume and thus the turn became known as a flying wardrobe act.

Cayetano's ethnic slur in the title "Canadian Peasant" does not seem out of place in 1812 when feelings between the two countries were strained and the war with England expected, or at least urged in some quarters. Beyond this, however, there are strong indications elsewhere in the culture of the period that Canadians were considered ignorant and semi-barbaric. With no ethnic minority yet established in the United States it may be that the Canadians were simply the closest target for such denigration. In any event, the act was called "Canadian Peasant" at least as late as 1818. Young Charles of the troupe of Douvillier and Barnette performed that year in New Orleans with 24 changes of costume.¹⁰ One wonders how he mounted the horse with all that clothing around him.

1823 is the first year we see the name "Peasant's Frolic" for this turn. Mr. Wester-

velt used that title in Salem, Massachusetts where he appeared with Blanchard's company. This name eventually gave way to "Countryman" which was used until the 1850's. The implication by then was that a farm or rube character would attempt to ride the horse. The ringmaster, known then as riding master, was now established and so was in position to be foil for the rider's jokes. For the rest of its days—that is to say, until today—this act was done in either country or clown wardrobe.

It declined in popularity in the 1840's, but was revived by Charles Sherwood, a famous comic rider, in the 1850's. He first titled it, "The Reaper", preserving the bucolic reference. By 1857 he was billed as, "Pete Jenkins' Visit to the Circus", the name by which it has been known ever since. Any flying wardrobe act on horseback is a "Pete Jenkins" act.

Sherwood's innovation was his rising from the audience at the ringmaster's general invitation for someone to ride the horse. After many pratfalls and near-tragedies Sherwood would gain his footing on the beast and proceed to divest himself of several changes of clothes, emerging finally in the rider's leotards. This is the scene so well chronicled in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*.

Thus we have three of the early equestrian offerings, two of them still with us. It is presumed that all of them were first done at Astley's which adds to the claim of that hall to be the first circus in the world, not only in time, but in invention. This is offered as one more proof of how much the American circus owes to that former Dragoon who one day decided to test his ability to stand on his head on a moving horse.

FOOTNOTES

1. Joel Munsell, ed., *Collections on the History of Albany*, (Albany 1865-71), 4 vols., Vol. II, page 63.
2. *Columbian Sentinel* (Boston), May 9, 1795.
3. *Charleston Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, December 1, 1798.
4. *City Gazette* (Charleston), July 10, 1802.
5. A. H. Saxon, *Enter Foot and Horse*, (New Haven, 1968), page 30.
6. *Ibid*, page 31.
7. *Louisville Public Advertiser*, November 1 to 22, 1823.
8. *Daily Advertiser* (Albany), January 26, 1825.
9. *Charleston Courier*, November 14 to December 22, 1812.
10. *L'Ami des Lois* (New Orleans), June 17, 1818.

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THE BILL GRIFFITH STORY

by Jim Lackore

SELLS — BIRNAM — AND “ALL OUT AND OVER” PART THREE

Bill Griffith is still in love with the circus. He'll even admit it when he's in the right mood. He's been off the road for nearly a decade—yet every spring he gets that melancholy longing. That glorious chapter in his life is over—he says there will never be another Bill Griffith show. But just the same, that feeling is there—and it still hurts when the days grow longer and warmer and the vital juices within seem to say that the time has come to leave the winter quarters.

Back in the spring of 1961 Bill was unable to resist the urge. He had spent the winter with the family printing business, but he really hadn't enjoyed it. Somehow, he told himself, he had to raise enough money to get back into the circus business.

At first, he considered booking an opera star during the off-season. He even wrote Rudolph Bing at the Met—making serious inquiry into the possibilities of such a venture. Bing wrote back and advised Bill to stay with the circus, for he would find tigers and elephants tame compared to opera stars.

Then, as Bill recalls, “it was in the early evening one night—over a couple of drinks”—that he got the idea to phone a booking agent friend in Chicago to see what he might have to offer. Before the conversation had ended, Bill had booked George Jessel for \$5,000.00 a week.

The gambit worked. By the end of 1961 Bill had gathered enough to get back into circus ownership by booking Jessel and other talent into spots throughout Wisconsin, Illinois and Indiana during the summer and early fall.

The 1962 Sells Bros. Circus used this ticket-office wagon. John Holley Photo.

Meanwhile, Bill and “Little Bob” Stevens had begun formulating plans for a partnership in a show which they would frame at Alamo, Texas and take out in the spring of 1962 as the Sells Brothers Circus.

Bill and “Little Bob” had first met when Bob was Concession Manager on the Hagen Brothers circus in the mid-'50s and when Bill was still just a circus fan. Bill remembers Bob as “a genuine ‘run away from home with the circus’ guy. When Christy Brothers came through Bob's home town of Coffeyville, Kansas—in about 1920—Bob left town with the show as a drummer boy. He was with the circus for the rest of his life.”

“Bob was a great guy,” Bill recalls. “He was friendly and outgoing. I can't say enough about him.” It seems that both men brought unique and complementary talents to the partnership and that they shared a respect for one another.

The two men pooled their limited cash reserves and Bob added his old Stevens and Sterling Brothers rolling stock and other equipment. (Sterling Brothers—Bob's latest show owned in partnership with Vernon Pratt—went off the road in mid-season of 1961.) They hadn't much to start with—and when the show was framed and ready to go the following spring, it didn't look like much. (Bill chuckles when he recalls that Ben Davenport “had never seen such a jumbled up mess of junk and equipment and he bet Bob \$100.00 that the show would never get out of winterquarters.”) Even the show's own Contracting Agent, Ray Duke, was quoted in a review of the show in the September-October issue of *White Tops* as saying that “the show was not at all outstanding in terms of physical equipment or appearance.” “But,” he added, “it was framed to make money, was well-routed and well publicized, and since spring had been doing nothing but business.”

That the show was well routed and pub-





licized was due to Bill's efforts — for that was his job for the two years that he and Bob were partners. By that time, Bill had developed what proved for him to be a successful routing policy. He stayed ahead of the show, and with maps marked with the routes of almost every circus in the country for the previous five years, he routed Sells Brothers into towns that had not seen a circus in recent years. If the town hadn't had a circus for five years, Bill reasoned, he knew that his show would do good business.

Bill also made certain that he routed the show so that it would play an agricultural area on the prospect of the crop. He believed that the show ought not to play the harvest, because at that time the farmers were obviously too busy. Neither should the show play the area after the harvest, because no matter how big the crop, it would never be as big as the farmers had anticipated. So, Bill figured, if you play an agricultural area a week or so before the harvest, "you'll 'cream 'em." He remembers the way he routed the show into the strawberry region of Arkansas as an example of the success of this policy.

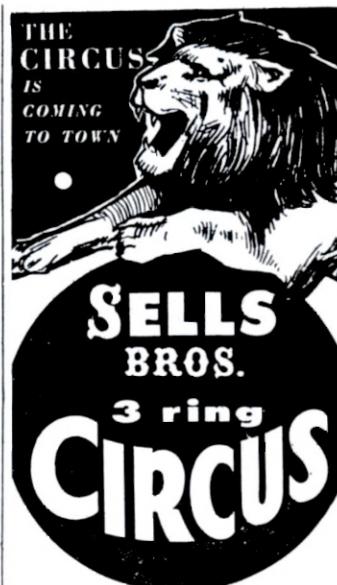
"Cream 'em" is what Sells Brothers did that year. Bill remembers that the "1962 season was phenomenal business, considering what a rag-bag of a show it was." And — Bill is quick to add — making money is what the circus business is all about. Bill is a dedicated circus enthusiast — and, as a circus owner, he always insisted on giving a good show for a fair price. But he was in it for the money, too — and he believes that circus fans ought not to forget that circus folks don't "play circus" just for fun.

Another factor that contributed to the show's prosperity that year was Bob's thrift. "That virtue," Bill recalls, "was Bob's contribution to my education which has stayed with me since. Bob was concerned with squeezing every penny until it yelled."

But we are ahead of the story. Let's return to the early spring of 1962.

We have noted, as Bill recalls, "that the show was a travelling trash pile." For example, the rubber on the vehicles was so thin that on the day of the departure from winter quarters one of the rear tires on the pole truck blew out while the truck was motionless. Minutes later the tire on the opposite side of the same truck expired, Bill

The midway of the Sells show was loaded with attractions, from the side show to a two pit show in 1962. Circus World Museum Collection.



jokingly believes, "out of sympathy" for its partner.

Bill also remembers how he had to drive the seat truck out of Alamo that day — and all the way to the opening stand at La Feria — in low gear because the clutch was gone. How did he do it? "It was easy," says Bill, "once they got me started with a push." Why didn't they put a new clutch in the vehicle? Simple — there wasn't a cent left in the cash box. What little had been left was used to repair the engines in several of the trucks whose blocks had been cracked by a cold spell the week before.

But the Sells Brothers Circus *did* make it out of winter quarters and it *did* open on schedule at La Feria on February 17. Ben Davenport, by the way, lost his \$100.00.

The rolling stock was painted white with red and blue trim, and Leland L. Antes, Jr., in his review of the show which appeared in the May-June, 1962, issue of the *Bandwagon* wrote that he would "put this show in the eight-truck plus private equipment class." When Antes saw the show in late March, the show-owned trucks included a pony ride and sleeper, ticket wagon and auxiliary light plant (s), concessions and main light plant (s), pole and extra props, canvas spool wagon, pick-up water wagon and converted bus for the lead stock. The major private vehicles included Louie McNeese's bull — Dyna — and her props (s), Woodcock's "bull" and state-room (s), Chip Morris' ring stock and Marie Loter's organ truck.

The show began the season with an old 70' round with three 30' middles "big top" which Bill had acquired from Bob Coul's Clark and Walter Brothers Circus. It had been abandoned on the lot at Fox Lake, Illinois. Later, Bill and Bob bought an 80' round with three 40' middles from the Circus World Museum. This was the tent that had belonged to Bill and his Adams Brothers Circus in 1960 and that had been acquired by the Museum after the Adams show had folded. This canvas was blue and white with red trim.

Seating inside the "big top" consisted of eight-high reserves and six-high blues. Antes reported that the prices were \$1.00 and \$.50 with reserved seats an additional \$.50.

Antes caught the show at Fredericksburg, Texas, and he observed that the "front end" included a "snake pit", rifle range, "six-cat joint", "grease joint", "juice joint", "white wagon", pony ride, "kid show", novelty stand and "corn and candy" stand. The Bradleys did sword and snake charmer acts in the "kid show" and the menagerie — under a 20' by 60' top — displayed three Woodcock elephants, monkeys, chimp, raccoon and goat.

John Holly saw the show on July 11 at Tripoli, Iowa, and in his review, which was printed in the September-October, 1962 issue of *White Tops*, he noted that the midway included a "snake pit" and a "what-is-it" featuring a coatiundi. The menagerie included three "bulls" (Frieda, Parrie and Punk) leased from Howard Suesz, a rac-

coon, buzzard, female lion, baboon, Australian Dingle, Barbados sheep, chimp, two bears and several monkeys.

An article in the March 31, 1962 edition of *Amusement Business* listed the following staff members for Sells Brothers at the beginning of the season: "Little Bob" Stevens, General Manager; Bill Griffith, General Agent; Ray Duke and Vera Himes, Contracting Agents; Billy Sheets, Bill Crew Manager; Harry Adams and Bob Williams, bill posters; Mavis Johnson, Office Manager; Dick Johnson, pit shows; Clara Stevens, Concessions Checker; Ted Wilson, side show, Doc Phillips, novelties; Frank Silverlake, Mechanic; Earl Tillman, Canvas Superintendent; Bill Dodson, Assistant Canvas Superintendent; Dave Boyd, Electrician; and Eddie Griffith, props.

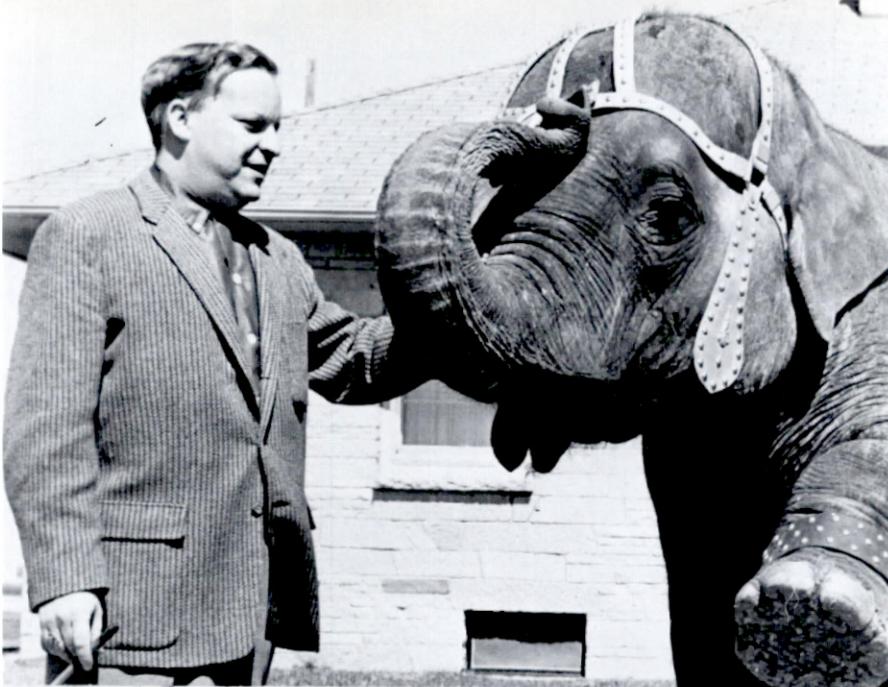
The same article noted that the show would open the season with the following program of displays:

- 1 — Spec (walk-around).
- 2 — Janice Silverlake and Chiki Noble — dogs.
- 3 — Clowns—Jeff and Peggy Murphree.
- 4 — Dorene Morris — riding mechanic.
- 5 — Clowns — firecrackers.
- 6 — Louie McNece and elephant "Dyna".
- 7 — Mavis Johnson and Janice Silverlake — swinging ladders.
- 8 — Chip Morris on dancing quarter-horse "Tequila."
- 9 — Woodcock's barbershop elephants — worked by Buckles and Barbara Woodcock.
- 10 — Concert announcement.
- 11 — Don Gillette's trained goats.
- 12 — Clowns — long shirt.
- 13 — Liberty Horses (4) — trained by Chip Morris.
- 14 — Sells Brothers Elephants (3) presented by Captain Don Lee.
- 15 — Louie McNece and "Liberace" — the piano playing chimp.
- 16 — Second concert announcement.
- 17 — Spanish Web — presented by Mavis Johnson.
- 18 — Clowns — camera.
- 19 — Woodcock's elephants — featuring Barbara Ann.

When the show played Davis, Arkansas in May, Morris Horn — who had been with Carson and Barnes — joined the show with his knife-throwing act. Ruby and Naomi Haag, Smokey Jones and his Bears, and the Great Jackson and his blindfolded motor scooter act trouped with the show for the Chicago area dates. And later in the season, Junior Brown replaced the Woodcocks as the "Bull" Man. Brown worked the three animals leased from Suesz.

The 1962 tour began in Texas and moved into Arkansas, Alabama, Missouri, Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, South Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico and back to Texas, where it closed at Iraan on November 1st.

The show spent the winter at quarters at Alamo and opened the 1963 season on February 9th at Port Isabel, Texas. The route, staff and talent were essentially the same as the 1962 season. The rolling stock, however, had been replaced or adequately



Bill Griffith is pictured with one of the show's elephants in 1963. Circus World Museum Collection.

repaired and a new "big-top" — a 70' round with three 30' middles — was purchased. It was white, trimmed in red and blue, and it had a blue and orange sidewall. A new walk-through side-show trailer was also added.

The first part of the 1963 season went well enough — marred only by a "blow-down" on July 19th at Iron River, Michigan. High winds and hail damaged the "big top" and for the next two days Sells Brothers "sidewalled" while the tent was trucked to Illinois to be repaired. But as the summer went on, a strain began to develop in the partnership which would lead to its dissolution. "Little Bob" loved animals. He had always made them an important part of his circuses. Bill liked animals, too, but — as he so wisely observes — "they eat." To feed and care for animals is expensive, and Bill's objective was to have a small, streamlined show that "would maximize profits and minimize expenditures." Besides, Bill had

always been partial to human talent—especially jugglers. And so, after the show literally "got lost" in South Dakota — for more than 24 hours Bill could not locate the circus because Bob had taken two days off to build a truck and cages for a malnourished elephant and an ailing polar bear which he had purchased from a bankrupt road-side show—Bill began to figure that it might be best if he and Bob would split up at the end of the season.

When the partnership was formed, the Phoenix Equipment Corporation was created to hold ownership of the rolling stock and other equipment. The name of the company — Phoenix — had been selected for its special meaning — for as the legendary creature had risen from its own destruction, so had the two partners risen from previous failure.

The operating corporation had been formed as Sells Brothers, Incorporated. When Bill and Bob parted company after the show closed on November 2nd at George West, Texas, each man received what he wanted most. Bill purchased Bob's shares in the Phoenix corporation for his (Bill's) in-

Sells Bros. CIRCUS

SEASON PASS - 1962

**PLEASE
HONOR** *Col-WM. WOODCOCK*

AND ADMIT TO BEST SEATS

BY

Bolister

terest in Sells Brothers. Bob took "everything that ate" (his beloved animals), the cages and the spool truck. Bill took the rest: the new canvas and miscellaneous show props, the GM diesel light plant, seats, poles, stake driver, concession department and the six new trailers and tractors that had been acquired that season. Later, Bill swapped the stake truck for the spool truck.

Incidentally, that spool truck was of particular significance. It was the first of its kind and was designed by Kelly Miller and built by Wayne Sanguin, a Hugo, Oklahoma welder. It had been constructed in 1942 and was used from 1942-47 on the Al G. Kelly and Miller Brothers show. "Little Bob" had picked it up in 1948 and he used it on his Stevens Brothers and Sterling Brothers shows. In 1962 and '63, of course, it was used by Sells Brothers. Early in 1964 Bill gave the truck to the Circus World Museum after he had found and reacquired his specially designed Adams Brothers spool truck which he had lost in the 1960 failure. The Miller-Sanguin truck is currently parked in back of the Library building on the Museum grounds.

Bill now looks back on those two years with "Little Bob" and the Sells Brothers show as easy ones for him and his family. Dolores and the children were able to settle down in Appleton. But, for Bill, being out ahead of the show just wasn't like being with it. He missed the day-to-day excitement and challenge that went with all the headaches and hardships. And so, as he took his share of the split to San Antonio in November of 1963, he was looking forward to the coming season and his new show which he would name Birnam Brothers.

When asked why he chose the Birnam title, Bill quickly replies: "Have you ever heard of another name that is so nearly like Barnum?" And with the same reference to great names in circus history, he named the corporation which owned the Birnam show the American Circus Operat-

ing Corporation. Selecting these names, of course, was consistent with Bill's penchant for closely identifying his shows — in name and advertising — with famous titles of the past. A particularly notable example of this was the "herald" which the 1963 Sells show used when making the run through old Sells-Floto territory in the Dakotas and Wyoming. The title running across the top of the page read: "SELLS Bros. featuring FLOTO." In appearance, however, the words were printed and arranged so as to suggest at first glance that it was the old Sells-Floto show that was returning to the area in which it had been so popular. (The words "SELLS" and "FLOTO" appeared in large print. "Bros." was printed in small letters below "SELLS" and "Featuring" was placed, in small print, between "SELLS" and "FLOTO." The elephant, incidentally, had been temporarily renamed "Floto.")

For his new show, Bill selected orange and blue as the theme colors. The trailers were painted orange and the tractors red. The lettering and decoration was in red, yellow and blue. A balloon trim motif was used in 1965.

The rolling stock for both years was essentially the same, except that during the winter of 1964-65 the crew built a pole and sleeper trailer out of a used auto carrier. The design was unique — with the sleeping quarters fashioned on the top of the carrier.

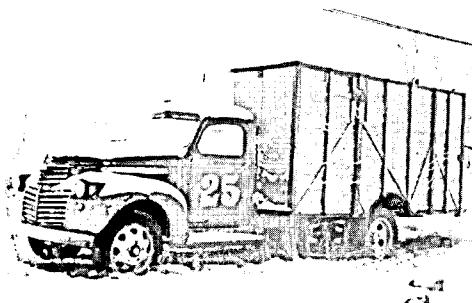
Leland Antes, Jr. caught the 1964 show on February 29th at Odem, Texas — and in his review in the May-June issue of *White Tops* he listed the following show-owned vehicles: Office and house car (s-built for Bill in 1963-64 winter quarters by Marv Gauger and patterned after one owned by Ben Davenport), power wagon (30 KW) and concession (s), canvas spool, sideshow front (s) and seat and pole (s).

Mr. Antes saw the 1965 show on March 12th at San Antonio — and in his review in the March-April issue of the *White Tops* he noted the addition of the pole and sleeper

trailer. He also observed that the crew spooled the "big top" with the sidewall attached and that the sideshow "top" rode on the spool truck trailboard.

Bill used 70' round with three 30' middles both seasons. Seating consisted of six-high planks on jacks and stringers. The side show was displayed in a 20' by 80' square "top" and was spotted behind the walk-through side show semi-trailer. In 1964 the side show "top" was also used for the cook house and the platforms were used for tables. A 20' by 30' cook "top" was added in 1965.

Birnam Brothers had a heavy and colorful midway. The lay-out consisted of three "pit" shows (snakes, a "giant" rat and a chimp billed as a "giant ape.") spotted on one side and the ticket wagon and side show on the other. Three food "joints" were lined up in the middle — in front of the marquee.



This is the original Miller-Sanguin canvas spool truck. Built originally for the Kelly Miller show, it was used on Sells Bros. in 1962 and 1963 and for a short time on Birnam in 1964. It was given to the Circus World Museum, where this photo was taken. Author's Collection.

The side show talent included — at various times — Dick Johnson with magic and escape routines; Brownie Silverlake with a Will Rogers-type rope spinning and talk bit; a "vent" act performed by Sonny Burdette; and Bill Griffith with a sharp-shooting exhibit. Bill also did the "opening." (1964-65, incidentally, were the only years that Bill played any sort of performing role in his circuses.)

Bill remembers the 1965 Birnam Brothers show as his finest circus accomplishment. "I was the proudest of that circus — it was the culmination of eight years of learning." He had set aside \$20,000.00 and he employed eight men full time over the winter of 1964-65 to sharpen up the show. In a letter to Chappie Fox in Baraboo, Bill wrote that he intended to "pick up many of the loose ends which there was no time for this first season, such as uniforms for the ushers, ticket takers, etc." Billy sheets spent the winter making an extensive wardrobe for the show, and a center ring spotlight and banks of colored theatrical lights (which were suspended crosswise from the quarter poles) were purchased. New ring-curbs were made from 1" stock and ring carpets were added.

Several of the 1965 acts were set for costumed, grand entries and the opening "walk-in" was produced with Chinese garb. "What

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The blowdown in Ballwin, Missouri, in May of 1964 is pictured here. Author's Collection.

"we tried to do," Bill recalls, "was to give the show some glamour—as best as a small show could. We tried to give it the 'Disney' treatment."

Music for both seasons was provided by recordings.

The 1964 staff included: Bill and Dolores Griffith, owners; Bill Griffith, Manager; Billy Sheets, Equestrian Director; Dick Johnson, side show; Louie McNeece, elephant and animal handler; Ray Duke, General Agent; John "Red" Trower, Canvas Superintendent. The 1965 staff was the same, except that Dick Johnson became the Show Manager and Ted La Velda came on as Side Show Manager and Producing Clown. Billy Sheets doubled as Chef in 1965 and Louie McNeece also served as Concessions Manager. Jack Bennett joined the group that year as Seat Butcher and Number 1 Stand Manager.

The 1964 talent included: Dick and Mavis Johnson; Dot and Sonny Burdette; Brownie and Josephine Silverlake; Norma, the elephant, worked by Louie McNeece; and Janet Hill, who did rozenback stunts and Roman Post riding. The 1965 talent was essentially the same, with the exception that three more elephants—Topsie, Punk and Frieda—were added. Bill purchased the animals from "Little Bob" Stevens in the fall of 1964. However, Frieda, the "queen" died the day before the show opened.

Leland Antes, Jr. made note of the following program of displays when he saw the opening show of the 1965 season at San Antonio:

- 1 — Juggling—three rings.
- 2 — Dogs — three rings — climaxed by Johnson's high-diving canine.
- 3 — Clown band.
- 4 — Foot juggling—Dot Burdette.
- 5 — Trained Chimp — owned by Louie McNeece and trained by "Red" Trower.
- 6 — Clown stop.
- 7 — "Norma" the elephant—plank walk.
- 8 — Clowns.



Another view showing the Birnam Bros. big top on the ground following the 1964 blowdown. Author's Collection.

- 9 — Program pitch.
- 10 — Aerial ballet.
- 11 — Rolling Globe, hand balancing and rolla-bolla — Dot Burdette.
- 12 — Single trap.
- 13 — Clown stop.
- 14 — Swinging ladders.
- 15 — Elephants.
- 16 — Clowns.
- 17 — Sedan chair illusion — Dick and Mavis Johnson as the "Ricardos."

Business for Birnam Brothers in 1964 was excellent. 1965 was less profitable than 1964, but more than 1962. Prices for the 1965 show were \$.15 for the "pits," \$.25 for the side show and \$.75 and \$1.50 for admission to the "big-top." Reserved seats were sold only on the inside (a standard policy for all Griffith shows) and went for \$.50. Bill, who liked to use printed material for his advertising, prepared an eight-page "herald" for distribution that year. While playing in Colorado, he also tried using TV

Owner Bill Griffith is pictured making an opening of the side show during the 1964 season of Birnam Bros. Circus. Photo from Amusement Business Magazine.

"spots" and found that method of communication to be most effective. He says that he would have used TV more extensively the following year, had he stayed in the business.

Bill paid his Birnam employees every Sunday. This was a trick that he learned from "Little Bob"—for by paying for a week's work (Monday through Sunday) he was able to get two "free" days of work from his people every year. This was possible because the show would open the season on a Saturday—and the first payday would not come until nine days later.

The 1964 Birnam show opened on February 29th at Odem, Texas. From there it worked its way north to Wisconsin and Upper Michigan before returning to Texas by way of the same states. The route card for that year noted that the total miles travelled was 8,443.

The 1965 show opened at Pleasanton, Texas on March 6th and moved north along through the same states as in '64. From





Griffith brought his original Adams Bros. spool wagon back and remounted it on a new truck for use on the Birnam show. This is a 1965 photo. Jay Beardsley Collection.

Wisconsin, however, it jumped Minnesota and took the "highline" out across North Dakota, Montana and Idaho before turning south through Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Texas.

Both seasons had their problems and difficult moments. For example, a spectacular blow-down occurred just before the six o'clock performance at Ballwin, Missouri in May of 1964. (Bill recalls that he got the six o'clock matinee performance idea from Jack Moore of the Carson and Barnes show. Bill discovered that the six p.m., rather than earlier matinee, brought in more business — especially "butcher" sales to hungry kids who had come with soft-hearted dads. He also liked the increased set-up time and the more leisurely day which were made possible by the later time.) As a large crowd was gathering on the midway and waiting for the gates to open, high winds and rain began to descend upon the lot. Bill wouldn't let the "towners" inside the tent, rightly fearing their anger less than what might happen if the canvas should collapse. Within minutes the wind toppled the tent, and, upon perceiving the misfortune that might have befallen them, the crowd calmed down. In fact, Bill recalls, many pitched in to help clear away the canvas and put up the seats and the sidewall. Within an hour, the show went on.

Near-tragedy struck a second time that season when the pole truck was demolished in an unusual mishap. The show was taking the back road to Steele, Missouri — the usual procedure to avoid the weigh stations in that state. Ahead, the narrow road went up a rather steep hump with a set of railroad tracks running across the top. The pole trailer had less than a foot of clearance and — you guessed it — got hung on the tracks. There it sat — with the drive wheels dangling — as a 95 car freight train came roaring down the line. The driver went running down the tracks, trying valiantly to wave the big engine to a halt. But it was

too late — and "kaboom" — the pole truck, as Bill describes it, "was very neatly divided into two pieces plus a lot of splinters."

The show blew Steele, Missouri, the next day (because there was no advance sale) and spent the day making new poles and seats. Bill called Bundy Oldsmobile in East St. Louis and a new tractor and trailer were on the way in hours to join the show.

The 1965 season had its share of problems, too. The day before the opening Frieda the elephant died and Bill had a difficult time finding a rendering plant to take the poor creature's cadaver. And on opening day, it seemed like almost everything went wrong. Dick Nongard, in his review of the event in the March-April issue of *White Tops*, described the situation this way: "The 'towners' got too close to the elephants, the music was left behind at winter quarters, the phonograph-public address system was inoperative, and the 'top' was late getting into the air."

1965 was the year that Bill decided that he would purchase no more used rolling stock. Second-hand equipment, he had learned from experience, gave nothing but trouble. So, in the spirit of that high resolve, he purchased a new bill truck just prior to leaving winter quarters. A few days after the show went on the road he received a phone call from the bill poster — the new truck had been rolled. The vehicle spent most of the rest of the summer in the body shop waiting for parts.

Missouri seemed to have been a jinx for the Birnam show, for late one night on a lot in that state the pole and sleeper trailer which had been fashioned from an auto carrier for the 1965 season caught on fire. The blaze started when one of the roustabouts fell asleep while reading by candlelight. He had placed the candle on top of a gallon can of "Little Bear" — a highly flammable canvas glue — which he had left beside his bunk. (He had not returned it to its proper storage place in another truck after using it.) The candle burned down and ignited the drippings on the outside of the can. The explosion and fire burned several of the crew, but no lives were lost.



The balloon design lettering of the 1965 Birnam show is shown on this view of the electric plant. Jay Beardsley Collection.

A few days after the fire, Bill and his family were abruptly awakened in the early morning by an excited pounding on the door of their trailer. It was Mavis Johnson shouting: "Bill! Bill! The side show truck has run into a bank." Only half awake, you can imagine what kind of "bank" Bill and Dolores thought Mavis meant. "All I could think of," Dolores recalls, "was dollar bills strewn all over the street." Further conversation cleared up the matter: it was an embankment — and Bill promptly placed another call to Bundy Olds.

Such was circus life for Bill and Dolores Griffith. They loved it — but by the end of the 1965 season they had decided that the time had come to leave it. It was time to settle down and give the children roots: "That was the main reason why we left the business," Bill recalls.

They returned to Appleton and leased the show title and equipment to Dick Johnson and Louie McNeese. Dick and Louie took the show out in 1966, but it soon folded and the rolling stock was left behind — scattered throughout the Dakotas and Montana.

Today Bill Griffith is the successful publisher of several smaller newspapers in the area west and north of Madison, Wisconsin. He and his family have established themselves in a small town outside of Madison and have become respected members of the community. But I believe that Bill Griffith — down deep — is still "circus" — and that he will be long remembered by fans and friends as a circus fan who made his dream come true.

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ONE SHEET

By Stuart Thayer

As a subject for research circus history is surprising in its diversity, has a well documented progress and its relationship with other facets of the culture is nearly universal. These are the reasons the topic interests such a multiplicity of people. One can study the performers, the acts, the technology, the financing, the animals, the historical events and its involvement with the society all from the same base of material. These are not exclusive traits, of course, the theatre, the military, organized athletics, to name a few, are in the same position. But our subject is the history of the circus and in this column I would like to examine a bit of the historiography.

The first group of the several responsible for what has been done are those who have preserved the material which contains the history of the circus. The oldest information is, of course, in books and the major collections of volumes on the circus are the Hertzberg Collection at the San Antonio, Texas, Public Library; the Toole-Stott Collection at the University of California's Santa Barbara Campus and the Hartmans Collection at the University of Amsterdam. If the gentlemen whose names are on these collections had not exercised their bibliophilic instincts toward the circus the research task would be much more difficult.

A second major source of information are the newspapers and periodicals, but these would have been collected, circus or no. Nevertheless, it should be worth recording that the largest collections of these are at the American Antiquarian Society; the Library of Congress and the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Some state libraries are in possession of unusually complete runs of their state's newspapers, notably Connecticut, Virginia, Mississippi and Illinois in those areas east of the Mississippi.

A third source of information is the proprietary material circulated by the circuses themselves, the handbills, posters, programs and such that were used to advertise and administer the organizations. As with most such material the preponderance is from more recent times than from the distant past yet fortunately, new or old, it has a certain value to collectors so its assemblage and preservation has been common beyond what it would have been were only researchers interested in it. The tendency with private collections is to keep them that way, but eventually most material finds its way into an institution and so becomes available for study. The controversy as to value is as alive in the realm of circus material as it is anywhere in more scholarly pursuits—the collector versus the student—and whether or not the material itself has any value beyond the information in it is not likely to be answered here.

Institutional collections of merit include the American Antiquarian Society, the Harvard Theatre Library, the Ringling Museum of the Circus, the Circus World Museum and, again, the Hertzberg Collection. This is not an exclusive list, mainly because of the writer's lack of experience.

The best source of information in any field are the memoirs, diaries and letters written by participants and we have a surprising amount of information available in this category, most of it still unused, and from the example of other fields of interest, most of it as yet undiscovered. Without John Durang's and George Conklin's memoirs; Joseph Blackburn's diary and the Dingess manuscript we would have much less of a picture of the circus than we do. Durang, who rode for Ricketts; Conklin, lion trainer for "Pogey" O'Brien, W. W. Cole and James A. Bailey; Blackburn, a clown of the 1830's and Dingess, agent for many shows over the years before 1900 all left fine, honest descriptions of their work and their worlds from which so much information has been mined.

More important than any of the above, however, are the uses to which such material has been put. The various generations have not lacked chroniclers and investigators and much work has been done, though it is of an uneven nature.

One must begin with Isaac Greenwood for it was he who first put down in order the history of the circus, which is not the same as putting down circus history. No writing of consequence prior

to Greenwood attempted the connection between antiquity, the European circus and its American child. His work is mostly of value in delineating the European antecedents. In fact, he falls down rather badly in the last few pages of his book, *The Circus, Its Origin and Growth Prior to 1835*, when he discusses the American circus of the 1820's. Unfortunately, he is the source of several statements that have been repeated by subsequent writers to the point where they are almost universally accepted and at the same time, utterly untrue.

For the period in American show business before the advent of the circus R. W. G. Vail's, *Random Notes on the History of the Early American Circus*, is the best source. Librarian at the American Antiquarian Society, Vail had access to its collection and made excellent use of it up to the point where he began quoting Greenwood. Together, their volumes are indispensable to the study of the circus and allied entertainment before 1800.

George Chindahl picked up where Vail left off and in his, *A History of the Circus in America* brought the research up to date, though by necessity rather sketchily. To mention Chindahl without mentioning his contemporary Charles G. Sturtevant would be to ignore the man who, possibly more than any other, brought circus history to circus fans, that is, to those whose interest was closer to nostalgia than to analysis. Through his voluminous articles in *Billboard* and *White Tops* he established a command of general knowledge of the genre, not deeply researched nor specifically intended to be. His greatest contribution, an outgrowth of his generalization, is his compendium of shows and their personnel published in *White Tops* in 1963.

Since these historians progress in the art has been more of a piecemeal thing and has become much more specialized. It is interesting that the generalized view has not attracted much attention; it is probably because the men mentioned above did such a thorough job. Also, the people who have come to control the dissemination of circus history have done such good service that specialization is easier than it was; so much more information being available.

In this regard the efforts of Fred Pfening, Jr., Charles P. Fox and Joseph Bradbury are primarily responsible. Pfening, since becoming editor of *Bandwagon* in 1961, has made that magazine the leading outlet of written circus history. Fox, in his capacity as director of the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin, fostered a great deal of interest in circus history that similar institutions had not been able to do, primarily through the establishment of the collection and the library. Bradbury, since becoming National Historian of the Circus Fans Association, has made that organization's magazine, *White Tops*, much stronger a contributor to written history than it had been for some time prior to his appointment.

One specialty interest that became popular, if the attention of a few people can be called that, is the history of circus wagons. The late Richard E. Conover devoted many years to that aspect of history and must be said to be the leader in that pursuit. Fred Dahlinger, Jr. has done a great deal of research in a similar vein.

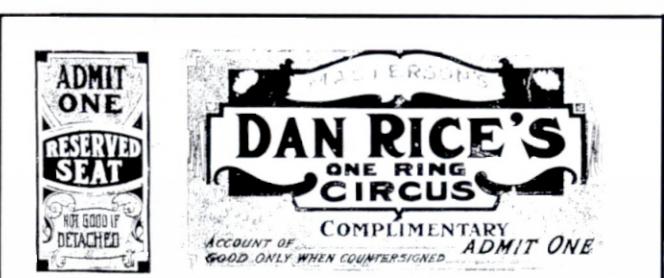
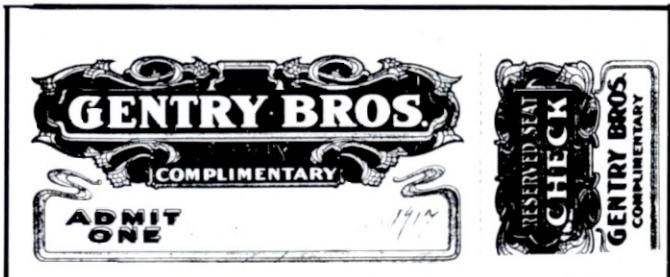
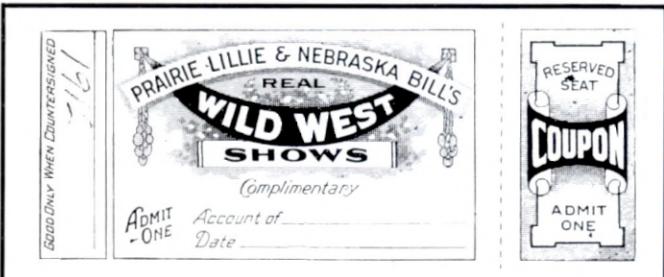
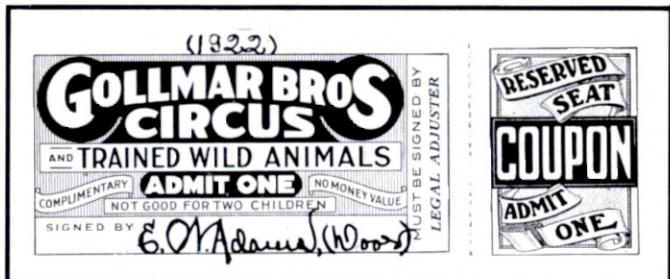
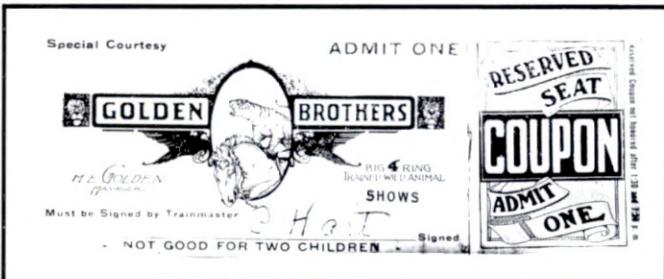
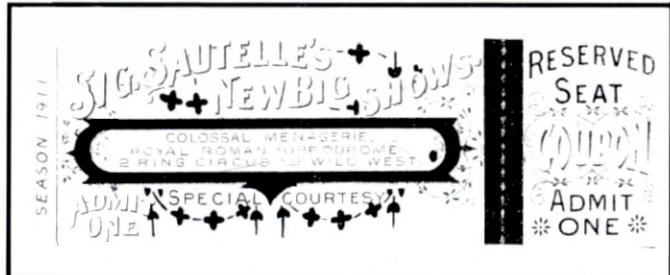
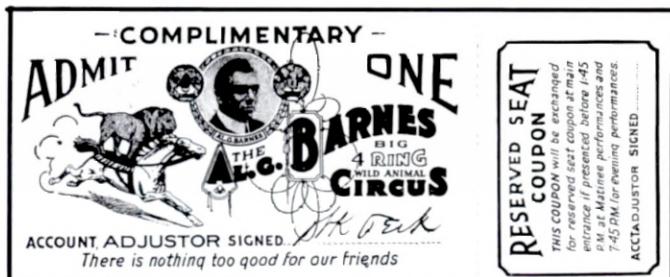
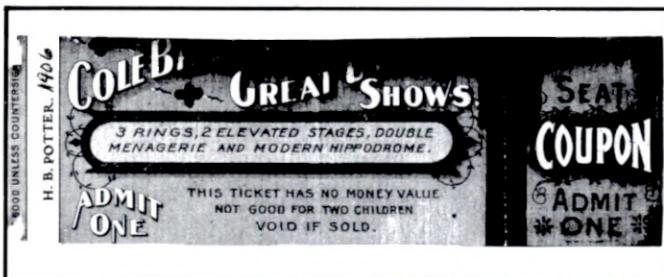
Joseph Bradbury popularized the recording of a single season of a specific show, a practice that has been widely imitated by other writers over the past ten years. Charles Reynolds has made much use of this format and continues to do so.

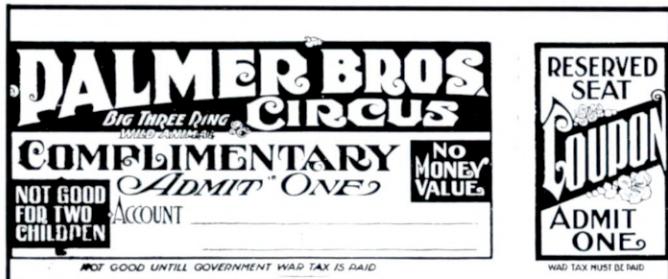
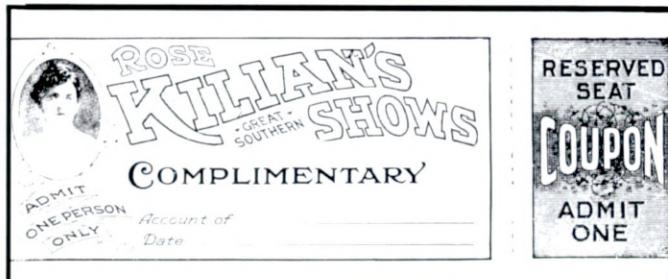
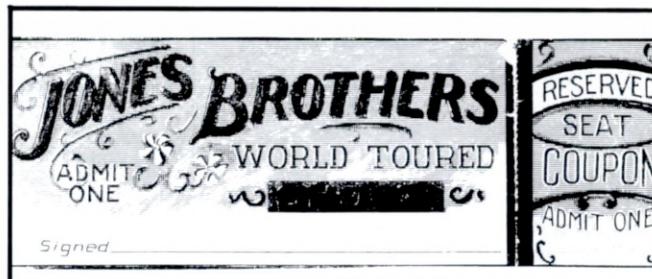
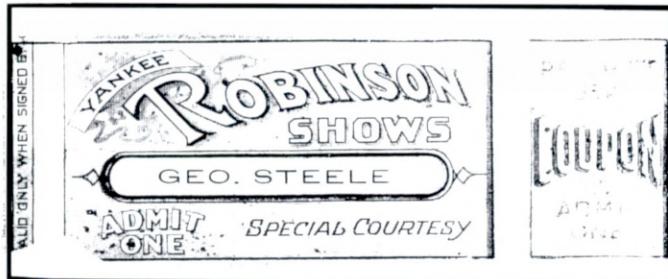
Possibly the most important aspect of circus historiography in recent years has been the application of an intellectual approach to the subject by various persons inside and outside *academia*. Space dictates that we save that discussion for a later column.

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A Thousand Footnotes to History

CIRCUS WORLD MUSEUM PRESENTS THE PAPERS OF WILLIAM P. HALL

By Tom Parkinson For
The Circus World Museum

PART SEVEN

GRASSROOTS CIRCUS BUSINESS

The daily mail at the old railroad advance car that served as an office for William P. Hall brought in a conglomerate of such proposals and requests as to be unbelievable even to those who have early warning about the nature of Hall's business. The letter-heads and signatures are a cross-section of grassroots circus business.

No effort has been made to classify the William P. Hall Papers according to date, as opposed to show, so at this time there is no way to tell what a typical day's mail looked like in either variety or number. Moreover, no one purports the Hall Papers to be 100 percent of his mail anyway.

But there is enough here to convey the idea that it was indeed a singular correspondence. Here are comments from some letters he received from irregular correspondents who wanted to buy or sell wagons and cars for the most part.

The Curry Howard Show of 1911 wanted to buy ponies, a flat car and a stock car. The Kirsch Show wanted small wagons and ponies. E. E. Coleman wrote on Christmas Eve, 1928, to ask if Hall had a calliope for sale and whether he could recommend Rebel Casey as a bull man.

James L. Livingston had a wagon show and wanted to buy the equipment to convert to a five-car railroad show in 1917. Pat Kelly, whose family was with him on the Kelly-Morris Circus in the 1950s, wanted to buy equipment for a four or five-wagon show in 1922. Leon Washburn, who sometimes had a circus and sometimes had "Uncle Tom's Cabin" shows, listed his equipment for sale in 1907. Jim Eskew, of wild west fame, was looking for a stage coach in 1921. Lew Morris had a Jesse



William P. Hall and friends navigate the mud near the second largest barn. Hall, in the white hat at center, wears his usual neckerchief.—Circus World Museum Photo

James show and wanted to outfit a two-car show in 1914. J. J. and John R. Russell of an early-day Russell Bros., wanted price quotation on parade wagons in 1919.

In 1918, Rose Killian offered to sell her show to Hall. She listed the equipment, including ten wagons, 20 horses, and a 60-foot round top with a 35-foot middle. Mrs. Killian felt compelled to sell because her sons had been drafted for military service.

Will Dickey of the Circle D Ranch Wild West wrote a couple of times in his efforts

This is the last letterhead used by William P. Hall. It is dated November 25, 1925. The name is printed in purple with an orange outline. Pfening Collection.

WILLIAM P. HALL



DEALER IN
- CIRCUS PROPERTY, WILD ANIMALS -
HORSES & MULES
HEADQUARTERS, LANCASTER, MO.



to find a circus man to go partners with him. Dickey had a wild west performance, playing fairs or longer runs, and he wanted to make it a one-day stand affair by combining with a small circus that owned cars and other necessities.

Flat cars were a big problem in the period just after World War I, when many people were putting shows on the road and Hall was just about out of things to sell. Heinz Bros. Show of 1920 wrote to report it could not buy the wagons it expected to get from Hall because it could not find any flat cars to buy. They wanted five flats, but the Venice Transportation Co., which leased such cars for showmen, had upped the rental rates from \$35 to \$40 for flats and \$50 for stock cars. Heinz made a comment here about the great demand for show plunder.

At the same period, the Hall-Roby carnival wanted to winter at Hall's farm and convert from carnival to circus or wild west show. At least that had been their plans, but now they had to postpone such conversations because they could not find flat cars in February, 1919.

Perhaps the strangest of Hall's letters in this category was the elongated epistle from one J. G. Kannahan. On his elaborate circus letterhead, with the usual ornate art work and fancy type, Kannahan proposed that he and Hall become partners in the operation of a circus. "It will take thousands," he warned. And to prove it, he cited his talk with Ben Wallace. It seems Uncle Ben had told him there was between \$200,000 and \$300,000 in the Great Wallace Show — 27 cars, 10 big cages, 8 little ones, 3 elephants, 713 people, 122 horses.

Kannahan went on for four pages. All about the show they could frame. And then he blew it. Kannahan confessed that really he had no show and never had operated a circus. The letterhead had been printed as a bluff so he could get information about circuses!

FAILURES, TRAGEDY

There is an undercurrent, if not straight statement, of tragedy in much of the correspondence that came to William P. Hall and survives now as part of the William P. Hall Papers at the Circus World Museum.

Showmen were out of money and out of

luck. There were foreclosures and failures. This was the everyday routine in Hall's mail. But some of the letters in the Hall Papers point up that tragic element more than ever.

Wade Coulter was optimistic when he reported in 1911 that he had given half of his show to Pete Culbertson in return for half of Culbertson's Irwin Bros. Wild West. But next he was writing to Hall to say, "You may think it strange in me not sending you any more money than I have been, but . . ." Times were tough in general and terrible for the Cole Show of 1912, with which Coulter then was struggling against odds that proved to be insurmountable.

Another time it was J. H. Eschman who wrote. He reminded Hall that he had bought three heavy baggage wagons with Sarvin Patent wheels (sic); one was a pole wagon. In 1918, Eschman had sold them to Charles Parker for \$125 each, along with two horses that had come earlier from Hall and a bundle of harness off of the Young Buffalo show. Now, moaned Eschman, Parker won't pay and says the wagons were worth only \$25 anyway. Eschman pleaded: Would Hall write a letter establishing the value so Eshman would have it for use in court? (JHE-WPH 7-13-20)

Lucky Bill had troubles and he broke the news a little abruptly to Hall:

"I am sorry Scotty was so careless. He never rode in the water before and he done it to show off and he met his last. He never came up after he slid off from the elephant. Now if you know some man that wants to come and care of Hero, send him down . . ."

That undated letter would seem to say that Hall's man with the rented elephant had been drowned. If it was the same Scotty that had been such a fixture around the Hall farm, it must have been a terrible shock indeed.

There was tragedy around any show that folded, and Hall was involved in dozens of those. But somehow the letter from Ed Baumeister takes the laurels for circus troubles.

He had Cherokee Ed's Wild West, and as a matter of fact he was Cherokee Ed, himself. That ill-fated outfit didn't last long but in its short time it became the first show to give a circus job to Floyd King.

Baumeister's letter is undated. Apparently Hall had offered to buy the outfit, but now Cherokee writes that he can't sell at the price Hall offered.

If Hall will send him \$10, Baumeister wrote, he would use the money to wire Louisville for money with which to pay Hall in full for what he had bought from Hall earlier. He wanted to close the cookhouse to reduce expenses.

"I'm with strangers," he lamented. "They don't know me and I cannot expect them to favor me. Send \$10 and I'll wire . . . I would not ask this but I have not one five-cent piece."

One wonders whether a man really could operate a show without any money at all. But then Cherokee Ed's Wild West folded, an event that must have come shortly after he wrote this letter. One also wonders why



This 1915 Eschman paper differs from a similar design with the addition of the Arizona Bill name. Title is black on yellow with red outline of ribbon. The Arizona Bill is red outlined in black. Circus World Museum Collection.

a collect telegram to Louisville might not have done the trick, if indeed there was any money available there.

TYPICAL ELEPHANT MATTERS

Elephants figured largely in the activities of William P. Hall and numerous letters in the Hall Papers are concerned with such animals.

The only surviving letter from the Atterbury Trained Wild Animal Show was written by R. L. Atterbury and he enclosed \$35, which probably was rent on his elephant.

Atterbury said "(We are) still fighting the rain and the mud. We get in about half of the time and business is good when the weather is good." And then of the elephant:

"Alice is at home now and has made no trouble. Got loose in night and prowled the cook wagon for \$3 worth of bread and

This Rose Kilian paper has all type and the photo in maroon. The inside box is in red with outside box in gold. Pfening Collection.

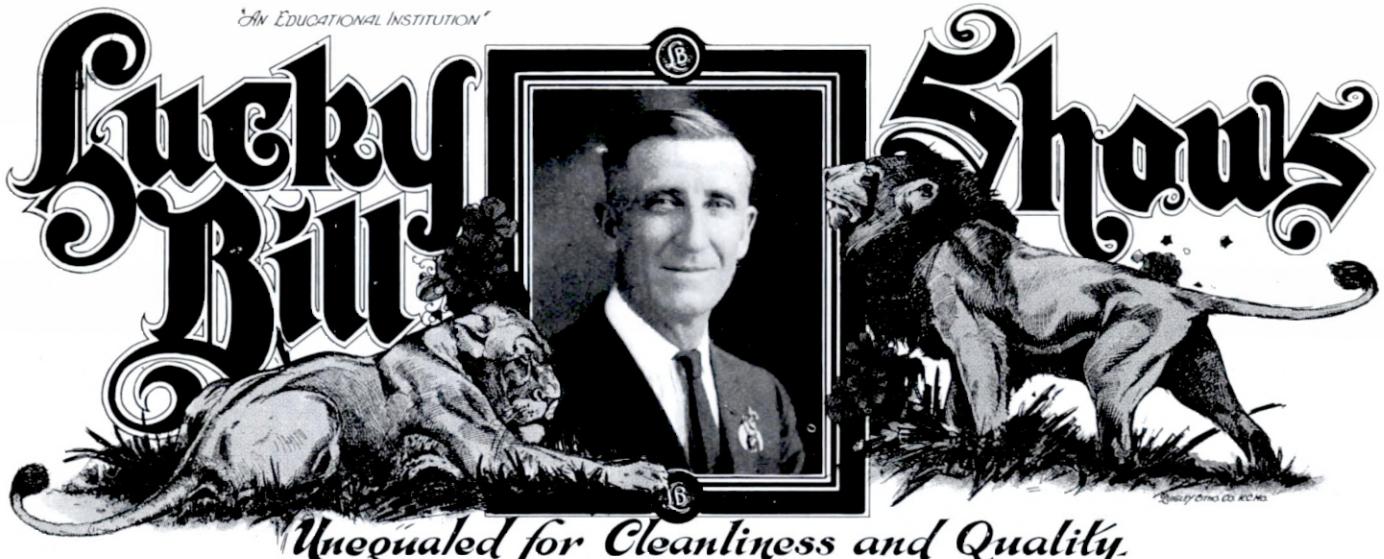
bushel of potatoes . . ." (RLA-WPH 6-27-19)

In 1914 a show called the Oklahoma Cowboys & Cowgirls Wild West wanted an elephant. Johnny Agee wanted to lease an elephant in 1924, it was about time to open and Hall had not answered his urgent letters. So his desperate plea was understandable.

J. H. Eschman wanted to buy or rent a small elephant in 1911 and specified that it should be "smaller than the one you rented Fish Jones." Two months later he wrote again wanting an elephant that fits through a baggage car door. (JHE-WPH 1-27-11; 3-14-11) Incidentally, "Fish" was a nickname for J. Augustus Jones that was used often among showmen of the time but survives now only in such letters and therefore is rarely heard.

Dealers corresponded with Hall, of course. William Bartels has been mentioned for his letter accepting Hall's offer to buy elephants in 1905. Louis Ruhe, Inc., sent a bill of sale, dated May 29, 1925, and recording that they had received \$10,750 for five elephants. Stewart Tait wrote from Manila on March 1, 1922, to offer six baby elephants at \$2,000 each. The Tait brothers were prominent carnival men and they played the Orient for many years. In an undated letter Snake King, the Texas animal dealer, reported to Hall that their shipment of elephants was due to arrive in Boston.





PERMANENT ADDRESS
ADA, OKLAHOMA.

Unequaled for Cleanliness and Quality.

En Route

The 1925 Lucky Bill paper has title in red outlined in yellow and black. Animals and grass in full color. It was printed by the Quigley Litho Co. of Kansas City, Mo. Pfening Collection.

Alex Glasscock is a circus owner about whom very little has been written or recorded. William P. Hall wrote to him in 1909 and the letter survives to give us a notion of Billy Hall's sales methods. He wrote:

"I have a very big gentle elephant that any child can handle. She has just a little touch of paralysis in the trunk but (it) does not hurt her from eating and cannot be noticed by anyone . . ."

The correspondence with Claude Webb is almost entirely about elephants. Writing from his Russell Bros. Circus, Webb said he wanted an elephant but that he could not afford it. "But 60 days in cotton country and I'll be ready," he wrote. (CWW-WPH 8-28-27) It seems to have taken a little longer. It was in February, 1929, when Webb sent his first payment on the elephant, Rubber, and promised to send his route to Hall. In subsequent letters, Webb paid \$25 on Rubber in March and \$50 in May. In a September, 1931, letter Webb writes about leasing two camels.

Honest Bill Newton wrote to Hall in 1920 about elephants. First, he reported in January that two elephants had died of disease and that he had sold the hide to the University of Oklahoma for \$375. Newton asked if Hall wanted four new motor trucks. (WBN-WPH 1-7-20)

He and Hall came to terms about replacement of the elephants. We have a letter to record that Al Langdon delivered a bull to Newton. But then the show owner complains bitterly about the poor quality of horses that Hall had sent him. (HBN-WPH 4-5-20)

The Gollmar correspondence in the Wil-



The Russell Brothers Circus of the early 1920s was not connected with the later Claude Webb Russell show. The name and photos are in blue with frames and acrobats in red. Pfening Collection.

liam P. Hall Papers also dwells on elephant talk, plus the possibility that the whole show could be bought.

The Gollmars asked for the price on small elephants if they took four. They offered to trade large elephants for small ones. They said they had not placed a price on their show "but would like to sell next fall or anytime if we could get what its worth." They would lease their title, and to point up its value they noted they had been on the road 15 years "and never had a game of chance". The Gollmars claimed they had "the strongest one-train show on the road." (12-29-06)

Maybe things were a little discouraging in late 1907. The Gollmars wrote Hall to recall that some time before he had asked their price for the show; they would sell it and lease the title. (GB-WPH 10-7-07)

In 1910 they asked Hall if he had elephants to sell to them. (GB-WPH 1-19-10)

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Advance Car Steam Calliopes

By Fred Dahlinger, Jr.

In one of the first articles dealing with the history of the steam calliope, calliope player Fletcher Smith related that in the "early" days many advance cars were fitted with steam calliopes. Concerts were given upon the arrival of the car in the city and at intervals during the day when the crew was at work billing the city and countryside.¹ However recent research indicates that the practice was much less popular than Smith indicated, less than ten examples of which have been uncovered.

Mounting a steam calliope on railroad equipment was not a new innovation. At the first public exhibition of the instrument in 1856, it was mounted upon a railroad flat car, towed by a steam locomotive from one city to another.² Similar railroad advertising trips were staged by the American Steam Music Company in late 1856 to promote sales of the calliope. In 1873, the Barnum show claimed that its wagon mounted steam calliope would be played along the route as the show train traveled from one stand to the next.³ This is the first time a circus utilized the instrument along the railroad right of way.

Advertising Car No. 2 of the Great London Circus in 1880 takes the honor of having the first bill car mounted calliope.⁴ The 1880 Great London lithograph illustrating the show's cars makes no mention of the innovation, indicating that possibly the idea was not conceived until after the paper for the year had been designed.⁵ This calliope was probably the one which was fitted on the light plant the previous year.⁶ The car and its instrument became the property of the Barnum & London Circus the following year.

The Barnum & London show had two advance cars that were fitted with steam calliopes. Car No. 2 in 1881 was presumably the old Great London car as Charles Lakier was the resident player aboard, occupying the same position as he did in 1880 on the Great London.⁷ Although some sources place three cars with calliopes ahead of the show in 1881, the route book for the year lists only two, the third having an organ.⁸ No reports are available for 1882, or 1883, but in 1884 the show offered to sell two advertising cars, sixty feet long, both equipped with a boiler and calliope. These cars accommodated fourteen people besides the agent.⁹ Although it is unknown if the cars were sold, in 1885 and 1886 the men who had played the instruments in the previous years were listed as part of the crew. This probably indicates that they had assumed the position in addition to the normal bill car duties. In 1888 Car No. 2 was listed as having a calliope, the same car repeating again in 1890, the last year the show was billed by a calliope equipped car.¹⁰

A short mention in the *New York Clipper*

places a calliope on the No. 3 car of Wallace & Co. in 1890.¹¹ If the instrument was removed shortly thereafter, it was in all likelihood the calliope sold to Willie Sells by Ben Wallace in the 1890's.¹² Although not a circus operation, mention will be made of the calliope with the 1891 Rolling Palaces because they were operated by one-time circus manager and proprietor W. C. Coup.¹³ Unfortunately the familiar Chester Photo Service photograph showing the six 60' cars parked on a siding does not reveal the instrument. When the operation failed and the cars were put up for sale, among the property was listed "the best steam calliope in America, made in Manchester, England."¹⁴ A calliope was never made in any country but America, the ad writer either confusing the calliope with the electric organ that was carried, or otherwise trying to brighten what was probably a dull sale. The show was in some manner financed by a Chicago syndicate headed by Thomas Grenier of Burr Robbins fame.

In 1903 the sixty foot advertising car of the Welsh Bros. Circus was equipped with a calliope. It was mounted in one end of the car, opposite the kitchen.¹⁵ The last advertising car to have a calliope was the one used by the Howard Damon show in 1909. One of the popular miniature George Kratz calliopes that could be operated by steam or air was acquired and arrived at Geneva, Ohio, winterquarters in late March 1909.¹⁶ This "economy" model of the large Kratz calliope used a modified spring balanced poppet valve instead of the Stoddard valve. The instrument must have been very effective since its steam consumption rate was better suited to the small boilers carried on the advance cars. The large instruments previously used would have been hampered by inadequate steam supply.

To date no illustrations of an advance car with a calliope have surfaced; indeed, physical details of the cars are all but lacking. The only quasi-admissible illustration of a possibly fictitious example appears in the 1881 ads of the James Heywood hall show ads.¹⁷ Except for the arrangement noted in the Welsh car, it can only be assumed that the calliope was mounted in the interior of the car, with side doors that could be opened to the outside, allowing propagation of the music. In 1889 the New York Aquarium Car Co. had at least one of its cars equipped with a calliope. Assuming it to be of similar construction to an advance car, we learn that the player was expected to keep the calliope room and instrument in order.¹⁸ To utilize all available space, steam must have been supplied to the instrument by the same boiler that "cooked" the paste used to mount the lithographs.

FOOTNOTES

1. Smith, Fletcher. "Old Time Calliopes and Players," 25 August 1934 *Billboard*, p. 37.
2. Loeffler, Robert J. "A Critical Re-examination of the History of the Steam Calliope," November-December 1955 *White Tops*, p. 19.
3. 19 April 1873 *New York Clipper* Circus Supplement, n. p.
4. 3 April 1880 *New York Clipper*, p. ; 1880 Great London Route Book.
5. November-December 1973 *Bandwagon*, p. 11.
6. 19 June 1879 *Madison* (Wi.) *Independent*.
7. 1880 Great London Route Book; 1881 Barnum & London Route Book.
8. 1881 Barnum & London Route Book. The route books of the ensuing years form the basis for the following discussion.
9. 13 December 1884 *New York Clipper*, p. 625.
10. 1888 and 1890 Barnum & Bailey Route Books.
11. 3 May 1890 *New York Clipper*, p. 126.
12. November-December 1969 *Bandwagon*, p. 26.
13. 6 June 1891 *New York Clipper*, p. 215.
14. 30 July 1892 *New York Clipper*, p. 336.
15. 24 January 1903 *New York Clipper*, p. 1069.
16. 27 February 1909 *New York Clipper*, p. 70; 3 April 1909 *New York Clipper*, p. 193.
17. 5 November 1881 *New York Clipper*, p. 547.
18. 27 April 1889 *New York Clipper*, p.

200 Years of Circus History On 50 Silver Medallions

The Hamilton Mint of Arlington Heights, Illinois, has announced the minting of 50 pure silver medallions to commemorate the history of the circus in the United States over the past 200 years. The Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin, was selected by the Hamilton Mint as a partner in the project. The first five or six medallions will be available this summer. An extensive advertising program in magazines and Sunday newspapers will introduce the sale of the silver designs.

The Circus World Museum's Commemorative Advisory Committee was appointed by Museum President Clark Wilkinson. They include William L. Schultz, Museum Director, Chairman; Robert Parkinson, Museum Historian, Vice Chairman; and Museum staff members Dale Williams, John Boyle, Marvin Gauger, and Paul Luckey, plus Judge Robert Gollmar, circus author; Stuart Thayer, CHS President; Tom Parkinson, CHS Vice President and Fred D. Pfening, Jr., CHS Director and Bandwagon Editor. All of the advisory committee are members of the Circus Historical Society.

The committee met on February 22, 1974 and selected the 50 subjects, as well as illustrations and captions for each.

Seven areas of circus history include THE AMERICAN CIRCUS, CIRCUS DAY, CIRCUS ACTS, CIRCUS SALUTES, CIRCUS ANIMALS, CIRCUS MOBILITY, AND CIRCUS PAGEANTRY. Each of these groups include six or eight subjects that range from the first railroad circus to truck circuses.

Each of the medallions will include an illustration and caption on the front and a short description on the back, they will be around 1 x 2" in size.

The Circus World Museum will benefit greatly from the promotional effort made by the Hamilton Mint. The project will be of great value in continuing to bring the circus to the American public, as the important phase of Americana that it is.



The Al G. Barnes - Sells - Floto Circus is shown in Amarillo, Texas, in September of 1937. The show played during the Tri-State Fair. Photo from Wilson Collection.